









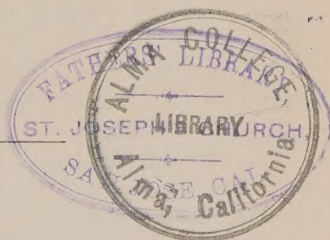


# CATHOLIC SERMONS.

A SERIES OF SERMONS ON FAITH AND MORALS.

CONDUCTED BY

REV. J. B. BAGSHAWE.



VOL. II.

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# CATHOLIC SERMONS.

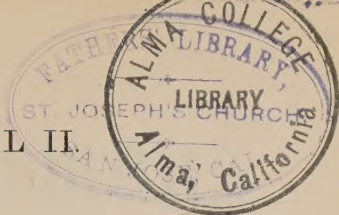
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# Catholic Sermons

BY REV. J. B. BAGSHAW.

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## SERMON XXXI.

BY REV. FATHER PHILIP LIMERICK, O.P.

*No. 1.—The Holy Ghost our Guest.*

“He shall dwell with you, and shall be in you” (St. John xiv. 17).

VERY wonderful are those words of our Lord in which He told the apostles that it was an advantage to them that He should leave them, in order that the Holy Ghost might come to them. “It is expedient to you that I go: for if I go not, the Paraclete will not come to you: but if I go I will send Him” (St. John xvi. 7). Nothing certainly could give us a more forcible idea of the need we have of the Holy Ghost, than to be told that His coming would sufficiently repay us for being deprived of the visible presence of our Lord.

In truth the Holy Ghost has a work to do for the souls of men that is absolutely necessary to them, and without which none can be saved. It was not on the day of Pentecost that this work was begun. The Holy Ghost had been working in souls from the beginning of the world, and the great manifestation at Pentecost was the commencement of a new outpouring of His gifts, which were to be distributed thenceforward in greater magnificence and abundance to men.

I have said that the Holy Ghost had worked in men’s souls from the very beginning. This is certainly true, for all the works of grace are attributed to Him. The Three Persons of the Most Holy Trinity are but one Being, nevertheless each of them has His special work for creatures; the work of the Holy Ghost is called sanctification—that is, the making us holy through the giving of His supernatural gifts to the soul, which both make it holy itself, and cause it to perform the works of holiness. Now, as there have been holy men from the

beginning of the world, the Holy Ghost must have been working in them. The grace which was in Adam at his creation was from the Holy Ghost, as well as that which, after the fall, enabled him to repent and persevere in God's service during his long life of nine hundred and thirty years. In like manner the grace of just Abel, of Enoch, of Abraham, of David, of Elias, and of all the other saints of the Old Law, was from the Holy Ghost, although they knew Him not by name, and at most had but a vague knowledge of His personal existence.

I have also said that since the descent of the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost, the gifts He has bestowed are greater in themselves, and have been given more abundantly. That great day was, therefore, not only His first public manifestation to men, but also the inauguration of the reign of grace. Not without reason, therefore, did our Lord say that the coming of the Holy Ghost would make up for the withdrawal of His own visible presence. The times since Pentecost are those foretold by the Prophet Joel: "In those days, saith the Lord, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and daughters shall prophecy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams."

All this we enjoy, and much more that it is beyond the power of words, even inspired words, to express.

I want to say, in two sermons, as much as I can about the relations between the Holy Ghost and our souls, His work in them, and His gifts to them; and it seems to me that I cannot do it better than by putting Him before you under two titles, namely, those of Guest and King. God's infinity is so completely beyond our ideas and words, that it is only by looking on Him, as it were, from different sides, that we can obtain even the imperfect knowledge that it is possible for us to have of Him.

In this sermon we will consider the Holy Ghost as our Guest. You know that this is one of the names which the Church gives Him. He is called "*Dulcis hospes animæ*—Sweet Guest of the soul,"—in the hymn *Veni, Sancte Spiritus*.



A guest is one who is entertained in the house of another. I call the Holy Ghost a Guest, because He is pleased to reside in our souls, yet will not come to them unless at our invitation, and remains in them only so long as we consent that He shall do so.

## I.

That the Holy Ghost really dwells in the souls of men is easy to show from Holy Scripture.

To begin with, we have the express promise of our Lord that it should be so. "I will ask the Father, and He shall give you another Paraclete, that He may *abide with you for ever*" (St. John xiv. 16). And almost immediately after our Lord said those words which I have chosen for my text: "He (that is, the Paraclete, or Holy Ghost) shall dwell with you, and *shall be in you*" (verse 17).

We have also the repeated testimony of St. Paul to teach us this same truth, that the Holy Ghost dwells in men's souls. In the first Epistle to the Corinthians he appeals to it as a thing well known: "Know you not that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God *dwelleth in you?*" (1 Cor. iii. 16). In these words the apostle compares the soul to God's Temple, and the presence of the Holy Ghost in it he compares to the presence of God in the Temple of Jerusalem—a comparison which would be well understood by those to whom he was writing. It is a very strong comparison, for the presence of God in the Temple was very real. And evidently St. Paul meant that the presence of the Holy Ghost in the soul is just as real, for he draws a very grave conclusion from it. He says: "If any man violate the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which (temple) you are" (verse 17).

But St. Paul has much more instruction to give us on this point. He tells us that whether or not we are spiritual and belong to God depends upon whether or not the Holy Ghost dwells in us. "You are not in the flesh, but in the spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now, if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His" (Rom. viii. 9).

Again, St. Paul tells us that the presence of the Holy Ghost within us is a consequence of our being the sons of God: "Because you are sons, God hath sent the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father" (Gal. iv. 6).

And again, the apostle teaches us that our resurrection from the dead will be owing to our having possessed the Holy Ghost within us, who will hereafter raise up from death the bodies He has sanctified, just as He raised the body of our Lord to life. "If the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, He that raised up Jesus Christ from the dead shall quicken also your mortal bodies, because of His Spirit that dwelleth in you" (Rom. viii. 11).

It is evident, therefore, from the teaching of Holy Scripture, that the Holy Ghost does dwell in the souls of men, though in what way it is that He makes His habitation in our souls is less easy to explain, for the spiritual workings of God are very far above our understanding. God's being is immense, and fills all space, so that He is present everywhere; but it is in a more special way than this that the Holy Ghost dwells in our souls. And yet His presence within us is less than the presence of our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, who is really and substantially present under the sacramental species. We can only describe the dwelling of the Holy Ghost in souls, by saying that He is in them by means of a created gift, of wonderful beauty and perfection, which is itself a participation of His Divine nature, and is so holy a thing that it cannot remain together with sin. We call this gift sanctifying grace.

Only one condition is necessary to be fulfilled in order that the soul may possess within it the indwelling presence of the Holy Ghost. Our Lord tells us what this condition is, when He says: "If any man love me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him, and will make our abode with him" (St. John xiv. 23). The condition, then, is that the soul should love God. Only let us do this, and we are certain to have the Holy Ghost as our Guest within

us. So certain indeed is this, that there is nothing more absolutely certain. Whosoever loves God with a true love for His own sake, the Holy Ghost will make His dwelling in that man's soul. This is not a mere opinion of theologians, it is the certain teaching of the Church. It is true even of the sinner. Only let him make an act of the true and pure love of God, and he will be justified at once, and become the temple of the Holy Ghost. It is true even of an unbaptised person. The love of God is the only preparation which the Holy Ghost seeks in the soul. Wherever He finds it, there He takes up His abode.

The effects which the Holy Ghost produces in the soul in which He has deigned to take up His abode are most wonderful. I will not dwell on the supernatural beauty which the soul receives, and which is, as it were, the radiance of His glorious presence, just as the sun's rays are the radiance of its splendour. He brings with Him other gifts of much more substantial value to us. Amongst these are certain divine virtues, beautiful and holy qualities, which ennoble the soul, penetrating its very substance. These virtues are said to be *infused* or *poured into* the soul, because they are not obtained by any effort of ours, but are brought by the Holy Ghost, and are put into the soul as liquids might be put into a vessel. I have already said that the Holy Ghost is present in the soul by means of sanctifying grace; this is also called *habitual* grace, because it remains permanently in the soul; but, besides this, the Holy Ghost brings with Him *actual* grace, which is a certain divine help given to us in order to enable us to serve God and perform the duties He requires of us.

But, besides these gifts which the Holy Ghost brings with Him to the soul, there are certain other effects which His presence in it causes. One of these is the Adoption of sons; it is the act by which God makes us His sons. Another is the Heirship of heaven, for it lifts us above our earthly destiny, and makes us capable of acquiring heavenly goods. And, lastly, the presence of the Holy Ghost within us obtains for us the favour of



God. He cannot but look with love upon those in whom He Himself has taken up His abode ; He cannot but fill with heavenly blessings those souls which He has consecrated as temples for Himself.

But chief of all the favours which the Holy Ghost bestows upon us, and beyond all the rest, is the infinite love and condescension which makes Him deign to become the Guest of His poor unworthy creature. What, indeed, are we that so great a favour should be bestowed upon us ? When King Solomon dedicated the temple which he had built to God's honour, on which he had spent so many years of labour, and had lavished all the riches of the world, he said : " Is it, then, to be thought that God should indeed dwell upon the earth ? For, if heaven, and the heavens of heavens, cannot contain Thee, how much less this house which I have built ? " (3 Kings viii. 27). And Thou, O Holy Ghost, art true God, the great, the lofty, the immortal One, who dwellest in eternity ; Thou art in all things equal to the Father and the Son, and no created space can contain Thy glory. Canst Thou, then, dwell in the souls of men ? They are taken up with earthly things, and are stained by many sins which are hateful to Thee ; at best they are but mean, base, paltry creatures. Canst Thou become their guest, and dwell with them—nay, in them ?

My brethren, it is even so. It is too great a mystery for our minds to comprehend. But our Lord's words are true : " He shall dwell with you, and shall be in you." The Holy Ghost does, in very truth, deign to be the Guest of our souls.

## II.

This character of guest is shown still more plainly when we remember that the Holy Ghost will not enter our souls unless at our invitation. He might, of course, come by force, without consulting us. He would have the right to do this, for He is our Creator, and we belong absolutely to Him. But He has made us like Himself—free. Our souls are our own, not indeed to the exclusion of His sovereignty ; nevertheless, they are

our own. We are free. Even He will not force us, not even for our own good, or for His own glory. Therefore, He waits for our consent and co-operation, and will not enter our souls unless we invite Him.

Have you ever remarked that the prayers which the Church addresses to the Holy Ghost are all cast in the form of an invitation? Chief of all these prayers is the hymn, *Veni, Creator*, which is always used when the Church wishes solemnly to invoke the Holy Spirit; it begins, you see, with the invitation, "Come." Then there is the sequence, *Veni, Sancte Spiritus*, which is sung in the Mass of the Holy Ghost; it begins with the invitation, "Come." And, again, there is the antiphon, "*Veni, Sancte Spiritus*—Come, O Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of Thy faithful, and kindle in them the fire of Thy love," which is so familiar to us; that also begins with the invitation, "Come." Now, this is certainly no accidental thing, and it insinuates the truth that I am urging upon you, that the Holy Ghost wills to be treated by us as a Guest. He waits to be bidden, and will not come to our souls unless we invite Him.

Yet we must not think that He is unwilling to come to our souls. On the contrary, He is most desirous to take up His abode with us. But He respects our liberty. And, besides, the favour He does us in coming is so great, that He may well demand that we should at least show ourselves willing to receive it.

And the manner of His coming is proportioned to the earnestness of the invitation which we give Him. To the apostles He came with vehemence, figured by the tongues of fire and mighty wind, which He used as the instruments of His coming, because their souls were all on fire with the earnestness of their desire to possess Him. Other instances are recorded in the Acts of the Apostles of the power with which He descended upon the early Christians. And so He has been wont to give Himself to the saints. He descended upon St. Philip Neri in the form of a globe of fire, which entered the saint's heart and enlarged it, and even displaced his ribs to give itself room. We participate less in His presence,

because of the coldness with which we invite Him. But, though He will not take up His abode except in the souls of those who are willing to receive Him as their Guest, nevertheless He offers Himself to all. This is a part of our faith. "God," says St. Paul, "will have all men to be saved" (1 Tim. ii. 4). And salvation is given only to those in whom the Holy Ghost dwells. There is, therefore, a moment in every man's life when this Divine Spirit offers to become his guest. He stands, as it were, at the door of that man's soul, asking to be admitted, waiting for the word of welcome which will give Him the right to take up His abode within. I do not say that all those to whom the Holy Ghost thus offers Himself know the grace that is being offered to them, at least in this form. Few realize that it is the Third Person of the Most Holy Trinity who is actually soliciting an entrance into their hearts. But all understand sufficiently that a Divine gift is being offered to them, of which they may become possessors if they will. I say that this takes place at least once in the life of every human being who attains to the use of reason; thus much is implied in the certain truth that God wills all men to be saved. But if we may judge by our own experience, it takes place many times in the lives of most men. The Spirit of God is not content with, once for all, offering Himself to be our Guest; He does it over and over again with wonderful patience and forbearance with our insensibility. And in general we may say, with truth, that if the Holy Ghost is not in the soul, then He is waiting outside, with infinite condescension, for admission to it.

### III.

And when He has been admitted into the soul, the Holy Spirit still remains a Guest; for His stay depends entirely upon the goodwill and consent of those with whom He has so lovingly taken up His abode.

He intends, indeed, to remain. Our Lord promised this: "He shall *abide* with you." And His abiding will have no end, as far as He is concerned, for our Lord has also said: "I will ask the Father, and He will give you

another Paraclete, *that He may remain with you for ever*" (St. John xiv. 16). You see, therefore, that, as far as His will goes, the Holy Ghost remains immovably fixed in the souls wherein He dwells. And yet His stay depends entirely upon us. No visitor could more scrupulously respect the will of his host than the Holy Ghost respects the independence of our freedom.

Our will need not be expressed in words. It is enough that it be so in deeds. So long as our lives are a tacit invitation to the Holy Spirit to remain within us, so long does He remain our Guest; but when our lives are changed, then He departs. I have already told you that it is charity—the love of God—which invites Him to the soul; and so, likewise, it is charity that is the condition of His remaining. While the soul continues in the state of charity, or, as we are more accustomed to call it, in the state of grace, the Holy Ghost always abides in it; but when charity is lost, He remains no longer. And you know that charity is lost by committing mortal sin.

Our Divine Guest is very compassionate towards us. He knows our infirmity, and He will bear with our imperfections and waywardness, and even with many of our faults. He will bear with our venial sins, though they are more displeasing to Him than it is possible for us to conceive; He will bear with them, because they are not incompatible with an habitual love for Him, though they do not belong to it, and even lessen it. But He will not remain in a soul that is in a state of mortal sin. Nay, He cannot. That sin is a sentence of exclusion, as formal and decided as if it had been expressed in words, for it is a distinct preference of His enemy over Himself. Light and darkness are not more incompatible than God and sin. Life and death could as easily exist together in the same body as God and sin.

It depends, therefore, entirely upon ourselves whether or not the Holy Ghost will remain our Guest. Let us keep ourselves free from grievous sin, then He will abide with us, and we shall continue to enjoy the inestimable benefit of His presence.



## IV.

It now only remains for me to speak of the treatment which the Divine Spirit should receive from us. Clearly something more is required of us than that we should abstain from grievously displeasing Him. When we receive a guest into our houses we do not content ourselves with abstaining from giving him mortal offence; much more than this is our duty. And so, likewise, is it our duty to do more than abstain from sin in order to do honour to the presence of the Third Person of the Ever-Blessed Trinity within us. We must not do less than treat Him as a loved and honoured Guest.

What that treatment is, the impulses of your own generous hearts will tell you better than I can do.

We welcome our guest. We do not receive him coldly or reluctantly. He has come at our bidding, and we receive him gladly.

Now, I trust that there are none of those whom my words reach who need to welcome the Holy Ghost. I trust that He has long been the Guest of all. But, if it should be otherwise, let me beg you to consider how great is the honour this Blessed Spirit does you in being willing to come to you. Invite Him, then, to enter your soul; open the door wide to receive Him, and greet your Divine Guest with the most loving words of welcome that your heart can command.

When we receive a guest into our houses, we keep out of his sight all that is ugly and unpleasant in them: we moderate the roughness of our own temper, and do our best to avoid the domestic jars and dissensions that perhaps at other times prevail.

We must not treat the Holy Spirit of God with less respect than we show to a visitor who is no more than a mere creature like ourselves. Everything, therefore, that we know will be displeasing to Him must be kept from His Divine sight. But He is God. His eyes pierce through all concealment. Nothing can be hidden from Him who sees to the very depths of our hearts. There is only one way of hiding anything from the sight of the Holy Ghost, and that one way is to destroy it

utterly. This, then, is what we must do with whatever thing in our souls our conscience tells us is unfit for the place where God dwells. We must do our utmost to remove that evil thing from our soul and destroy it. O how gladly He will aid us in such a work as this, if we undertake it earnestly! What knowledge He will give us of the nooks and corners of our hearts, where so much that is evil lies hidden, quite unsuspected by us; and what strength He will give us to help us in our task!

Again, when we have a guest with us, we do not treat him meanly, but generously. Whatever affectionateness of soul we have, whatever gentleness and kindness of manner, we produce it to do him honour. And we are generous in giving him of the best we possess.

Shall we be less generous with the Holy Ghost, whom we possess in our souls? He is not less worthy of noble treatment than one of His own creatures. Shall we, then, be tender, loving, generous to all else, and cold, mean, narrow-hearted only with Him? In truth, He meets with but scanty generosity in the greater number of the souls wherein He abides. And yet I believe that it is more from ignorance, or want of thought, that this arises, than from malice. It never occurs to most Christians that loving tenderness and generosity are due to God, who nevertheless demands it so earnestly of us, and has done so much to deserve it from us.

Once more, when we have a guest we occupy ourselves with him. We do not leave him to himself, or forget him. We try to spare all the time we can from our ordinary occupations, in order to devote it to him. We lay aside, for the time, our own selfish amusements, and sacrifice ourselves to entertain him.

Let us do the same for the Divine Guest who abides always with us. Alas, we must own that we have been neglectful of Him—we have even almost forgotten that He has taken up His dwelling within our souls as His chosen home. And we have thought of well-nigh everything, rather than of devoting ourselves to Him. When

we have had time to spare, we have employed it on almost any frivolous occupation rather than spend it with Him. He has been our last thought. No doubt we have had the habit of greeting Him, morning and night, with some short prayer; yet how many times we have neglected even that, and how often the salutation has been no more than a form! Who would think of walking about for hours by the side of a friend without so much as addressing a word to him? Who would think of spending a whole day in the same house with another without speaking to him? Yet this is what we have done, and probably what we do habitually, with regard to our Divine Guest. We have Him always with us in the interior dwelling-place of our souls; yet hours pass, and we say no word to Him—days go by, and we scarcely speak to Him.

Let us try to realise that the Third Person of the Most Holy Trinity dwells with us, has His abiding place in our souls; and let us do our best to make ourselves worthy of possessing Him. Worthy, indeed, we never can be, but we may at least make ourselves less unworthy than we are now. We can remove that which is displeasing to Him in us. We can bear ourselves towards Him with more familiar love. We should do this, because He is deserving of it, and not for the sake of any advantage to ourselves. Nevertheless, this "Sweet Guest of the Soul" will not let it go unrewarded. God's presence in heaven makes all its beauty, and is the cause of all its happiness. And the presence of the Holy Ghost in our souls will make a heaven in them—a heaven of peace and contentment, where we may shelter ourselves from the world, refresh ourselves after our conflicts, and gain new strength to do battle with our spiritual foes.

# Catholic Sermons

BY REV. J. B. BAGSHAWE.

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## SERMON XXXII.

BY REV. FATHER PHILIP LIMERICK, O.P.

*No. 2.—The Holy Ghost our King.*

“The kingdom of God is within you” (Luke xviii. 21).

THERE is much that is seemingly contradictory in the ideas which our faith gives us of God. If we speak of His mercy, so widely extended is it shown to be, that it seems He is nothing but mercy, and anything that is severe seems to be inconsistent with His nature. On the other hand, if we speak of His justice, so terrible are the effects that are ascribed to it, so stern and rigorous are its judgments, that it would appear that He is nothing but justice, and that there is no room for compassion in Him. The contradiction is, of course, only in appearance, and the cause of it is the infinite greatness of the Divine attributes, which makes it impossible for us to grasp them, or even to state them, unless in terms that seem excessive.

The same kind of contradiction seems to exist when we endeavour to describe what goes on between God and our own souls. On the one hand, our salvation would appear to be entirely our own work, so completely does it depend on our active co-operation, on our correspondence with God's grace, on our repentance for sin, on the prayers we say, and the good works we perform. But, on the other hand, it just as truly seems to be God's work, dependent wholly on His grace, which must inspire everything that we do, and accompany it, in order that it may have any supernatural worth. Here the mysteries are not wholly on God's side, but on our own as well. Who understands himself, his own



nature, and especially his own free will? Who can accurately state his own motives and aims? And if we are mysteries even to ourselves, still more may we expect to find mysteries in our relations with the Most High.

Now, as I reminded you in my previous sermon, all the operations of grace in the soul are the special work of the Holy Ghost, the Third Person of the Blessed Trinity, just as creation is the work of the Eternal Father, and redemption the work of God the Son. Thus, all these mysteries that are found in the dealings of God with our souls relate to the working of the Holy Ghost in them. In my former sermon I spoke to you of them under one of their aspects—namely, that which looks at them from the side of *our* power and freedom, and God's condescension. Now, I have to show you in these same relations *God's* power, and our subjection. Both these views are most real and true, and though they may seem to be contradictory, they are not so in reality.

The difficulty we find in reconciling these two aspects arises simply from the feebleness of our minds, which cannot harmonise man's free will and God's omnipotence. In truth, we cannot fully understand our own freedom, much less God's supreme authority. I am not going to attempt to reconcile the two—it is far above me. I can only state the two aspects of the same truth. I have told you that, in the working of the Holy Spirit in the soul, man is free—so free, that the Holy Ghost is our Guest, who will not come into our souls unless we invite Him, and will stay only so long as we permit Him. To-day I have to tell you that the Holy Ghost is the King of our souls, who possesses supreme authority over them, and who alone has the right to rule in them, to whom, therefore, we owe exact obedience of mind and will.

#### I.

There are two ways in which royal authority is obtained among men: the one is by *birth*, for some men become kings because their fathers were so before them;

the other is by *election*, namely, when their subjects choose them, to be kings. The Holy Ghost may be said to be King over souls in ways corresponding to both these that I have named. He is King, not indeed by birth, but by right of nature; and He is also King by right of our free choice.

He is King by right of nature.

No idea of God that we may have is a true one, unless it includes the notion of supreme, absolute, and universal authority. For by God we mean the first principle of all things, from whom, therefore, everything proceeds. No higher authority can be imagined than this. He claims no power except over the creatures whom He has made, and over the things which He has Himself bestowed.

Even the heathen, though they clothed their false gods with the attributes of men, or raised men to be gods, did not forget that supreme power belongs to the idea of God; they gave it, therefore, to their false divinities, though they often limited it to a certain sphere, because these divinities were themselves limited in their being: a god of war, for example, was, in their idea, supreme in all matters relating to war; a god of the sea ruled uncontrolled in the ocean, which they thought to be his dominion. But we know that there is but one God, whose Being has no limits whatever, since He is infinite and immense; therefore, His power and dominion must be supreme over all things that exist.

But rebellious men have always been desirous to escape from the authority of the Most High. The attempt is but folly; nevertheless, many have cheated themselves into thinking that they could make themselves independent of Him, and there are many who are still engaged in this self-deceit. Some have tried to do so by confounding God with His creatures; they have said that nature itself is God, and everything that exists a part of Him—that thus, being themselves a part of God, they might owe obedience only to their own will,

or, at any rate, that they might thus get rid of a personal God, who has a will to be obeyed.

But if we admit—as our very reason alone compels us to admit—that God really exists outside of us with a Being of His own, we must also admit that He is King over all His creatures by His very nature. He could not be anything else, even if He would, any more than a father can help being the head of his own family; he *is* its head—nature made him so. And so God is the head of all things that exist, and cannot be anything else. It is more than nature that makes God our King—it is His own divine, eternal, necessary existence, which needs no creatures, but is sufficient for His own glory and happiness, yet has created them of His free will, and for His own divine purposes.

But God is King also by our election.

He possesses a full right to our submission by His own nature, and eventually we shall become subject to Him, whether we will or no. In exterior matters even now we cannot escape His rule; we may make our puny efforts to set Him at defiance, and it appears to us that at least at times we succeed: but He still holds us in His hands, and permits our rebellion to go no further than He pleases—no further than will turn at last to the manifestation of His glory, and the good of His servants. Every other effort of ours to disobey Him, even in this life, He checks and brings to nought. You see that He is a true King, even over those who are most rebellious against His authority, for His authority always remains supreme.

But within our own souls we have more liberty. While we are in this life, God will exercise His authority within our souls only so far as we choose. If we will accept Him as our Ruler, He will reign over us, but not otherwise. It is thus that He becomes our King by right of our election.

It is a strange and wonderful power that we possess, this power of rejecting God's authority over our souls; it is a power that is not, of course, given to be used in

refusing to let God reign over us, but in order that our obedience may have the merit of being free. But still more wonderful, as it seems to me, is the power we have of choosing God for our King, of setting Him on a throne in our hearts, and crowning Him in the temple of our souls. Yes, it is indeed wonderful that the creature should have the privilege of thus exalting His Creator, and we are never so great as when we raise the Holy Spirit upon a throne within us, and humble ourselves in subjection before Him. He who makes a king is in some measure a king himself, and there is a royalty in every Christian, as St. Peter testifies when he says: "You are a chosen generation, a kingly priesthood" (1 Peter ii. 9).

## II.

But, some one may say, all that has just been said of the royal authority of God applies to the Godhead in general. Why, then, do you say that it is the Holy Ghost in particular who is the King of our souls? If the title be applied especially to one of the Three Divine Persons, ought it not to be the Eternal Father? For it is creation which is the source of God's authority over us, and creation is the work attributed to the First Person of the Holy Trinity.

I answer that it is, of course, true that the Most Holy Trinity is King over all creatures. Nevertheless, the title is especially ascribed to our Blessed Lord, because by His blood He purchased dominion over us, and also to the Holy Ghost, because it is by Him that the royal authority of God is exercised within us.

Our Lord has told us that the kingdom of God is in our souls: "The kingdom of God is within you" (St. Luke xvii. 21). Now, by a kingdom we mean a certain territory, within which a king rules. He takes charge of it; he defends it from enemies who attack it from without; he keeps peace and good order within its borders; He uses all his wisdom and resources to make it fruitful and prosperous; and, that he may be able to do this, all his subjects are bound to obey the just laws he may make.



This is just the work of the Holy Ghost in our souls, and therefore He is truly their King. He watches over our safety, and, so long as we are true to Him, the devil, the world, and the flesh may assault us, but they will assault us in vain, for we shall be safe under his protection. He keeps peace within us, subduing our rebellious passions, controlling the irregular impulses of our natural desires. He makes us fruitful in good works, inspiring us to do them, helping us to perform them, and ever urging us on to greater perfection. But that all this may be effected in us, we must be obedient to His commands. He makes his will known by the teachings of our conscience, and to them we must be submissive. So long as we abide under His rule, and are His faithful subjects, there is no fear but that we shall be rich in merits and prosperous before God.

But let us go a little more into detail, in order that we may understand more clearly in what consists this kingdom of the Holy Spirit within us.

There are two provinces of our being—if I may so speak of them—in which God especially claims to reign, and which form His kingdom within. These two provinces are the mind and the will. I say nothing of the body; of course, it belongs to God, but it is an external kingdom, and is subject to the soul. Provided the mind and will serve God, there is no doubt but that the body will do so also. It is but a servant—often, no doubt, an unruly servant, yet a servant still—and when the will commands, the body must obey. The mind and will, therefore, are the two provinces of the kingdom of the Holy Ghost within us.

The mind is made to receive and know truth. Sometimes, indeed, it receives falsehood, but only because it is thought to be truth. Nobody ever believes a lie, knowing it to be a lie; whenever a lie is received by the mind, it is always because it comes in the disguise of truth. The mind is meant for truth; and if you can find any being that the soul so reverences and trusts as to receive as true whatever he says, that being is king of

the mind, because he exercises authority over it in respect of its own proper object. Now we often take things on trust from men, and believe what they tell us on their authority; but when we do this, we do it with certain limitations—we believe them when they tell us what is within their own experience, or things of which they have special knowledge; when they go beyond this, we withhold our assent, or give it only with reserve.

There is but one Being whose authority we receive without exception and without reserve. There is but One who even claims to guide us in all things without possibility of deceit or error. That one Being is the Holy Ghost. I claim, therefore, for Him the royal crown of authority over the mind of men. He is the King of our souls.

For this we have the authority of our Lord's own words.

Listen to the words He used when He promised that the Holy Spirit should be given to us. "I will ask the Father, and He shall give you another Paraclete . . . . the Spirit of Truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth Him not, nor knoweth Him" (St. John xiv. 16-17). I conclude, from this promise of our Lord, that the very purpose for which the Holy Ghost comes to us is that He may be a Spirit of Truth to us,—that is, an Authority to guide our minds in the knowledge of truth and preserve them from error. What is this but to exercise a royal authority over the mind?—what is this but to be a King in the soul? The only way in which He can be received, is by submission to His supreme authority: this is clear from what our Lord tells us as to His rejection by the world; the world, He says, "cannot receive Him, because it seeth Him not nor knoweth Him;" that is, because it does not recognize His right, and refuses obedience to Him.

Listen again to what our Lord tells us concerning the mission of the Holy Ghost: "But when the Paraclete cometh, whom I will send you from the Father, the Spirit of Truth, who proceedeth from the Father,

He shall give testimony of me" (St. John xv. 26). From this I infer that the Holy Spirit is the highest authority concerning truth. He comes as a witness of it,—that is, to affirm it, to assert it boldly, authoritatively. He comes from the Father,—that is, from the bosom of the Godhead, which is the fulness of eternal and necessary truth. He comes to teach the highest truth, the truths relating to our Lord and His mission,—“He shall give testimony of me.” What is this but to be a very monarch of the soul, a King of truth?

Let us once more listen to our Lord's words. “But when He, the Spirit of Truth, is come, He will teach you all truth” (St. John xvi. 13). From this we learn that the Holy Ghost has universal authority over the minds of all who receive Him. “He shall teach you all truth.” There is no exception made, nor can there be, for there are no contradictory truths, none that are independent. All truth is from God, and all truth is, therefore, taught by the Holy Spirit. He may use different instruments to instruct us in it, but whether we call it revealed truth or truth acquired by experience, truth of faith or truth of science, all alike is His truth, proceeding from Him, and made known by Him to our minds.

The Holy Ghost is, therefore, a practical ruler of the soul in all that belongs to the knowledge of truth. He instructs it by means of the Church, by the Holy Scriptures, by the writings of the doctors of the Church and holy men; He gives it a capacity for believing, a power of receiving truth that is more than the ordinary capacity of the mind; and He guides it in all matters relating to its eternal interests.

I believe, too, that His presence in the soul greatly increases the power of the mind to obtain the knowledge of natural truth, gives it greater width of perception, greater vigour in grasping the truth. And I believe, too, that He is the best guide, even in matters of temporal concern. Not, indeed, that He will guide us to wealth and temporal prosperity, but He will direct us in such a way that we shall obtain the greatest

happiness and peace that can be possessed in this fallen world, while we shall, at the same time, be making our lives tend ever more and more towards heaven.

Now let us turn to the other province of our being, as I have called it, over which the Holy Spirit of God claims to exercise dominion—the will.

As the mind is the faculty of our soul, which knows things as they are, receives the truth, and believes it, so the will is the faculty which loves that which is good, desires and seeks it, and rules over the rest of our being.

Certainly, if there is any part of our being that God claims for Himself more than another, it is the will, or, as we are accustomed to say, the heart, for the heart is the organ which corresponds in the body to what the will is in the soul, and is the seat of sensible affection. It was under the ancient dispensation that God said: "My son, give me thy heart" (Prov. xxiii. 26). Nothing different is meant by the service of charity, in which the New Testament consists. That we should give God the service of our hearts and wills is the one commandment which includes all the rest of the law.

Now, the work of the Holy Spirit, when He comes to dwell within us, is to subdue our will, and make it subject to His own will.

He can enter the soul only when the will is surrendered to Him. And the will surrenders itself to God when it gives up mortal sin, and intends to lead a Christian life, in the practice of His commandments. When the soul has done this, the Holy Ghost enters it.

Consider what this surrender imports. It means, first of all, that the soul takes God as the final end and object of its existence. It means, further, that the soul intends henceforth to look forward to an everlasting life in God's kingdom, and to make its present life square with that hope. It means, also, that the soul is willing to renounce—aye, and actually does renounce—everything that is incompatible with having God for its end, and heaven as its future home—that is, everything by which



God is gravely offended, namely, mortal sin. It means, lastly, that the soul is disposed to make use of those things which God prescribes as necessary means of making it fit to dwell with Him in heaven, such as the Sacraments, prayer, mortification, and many others. Now, when the soul does this, it certainly puts its will under the authority of the Holy Ghost, takes Him for its ruler, and submits to His laws, for these things are exactly the things which the Blessed Spirit of God commands us. To obey Him in these things is, then, to establish the kingdom of God in the soul. Whoever does this much obeys the Holy Spirit in thought, word, and deed—at least, in all grave matters. It is no small act of submission to make.

But the souls who do no more than this are those over whom the Holy Ghost exercises His authority in the lowest degree; they do no more than what barely includes them in the number of His subjects. There are vast numbers who do much more than this, whose obedience is more minute, more exact, more hearty, and more fervent. On His side the Holy Spirit never ceases to labour in the souls in which He dwells, until He brings them wholly into conformity with Himself, even to the smallest actions, nay, even to their interior dispositions, motives, and intentions. In such souls as these He rules more perfectly than in the rest; they are His truest and most loyal subjects, and form as it were the nobility of His kingdom.

And now remark how real is this authority which the Holy Ghost exercises over souls. It extends itself to every department of life. There is nothing in which a man may say to himself, "In this, at least, I am independent, and may act without reference to my Divine King." It is an authority which demands sacrifices of its subjects, and often in matters that lie very close to the heart. Even the most ordinary Christian, leading the most common-place Christian life, has now and then to make sacrifices that cost him a severe struggle. And those who lead a more perfect life have

still more to give up out of obedience to the Divine King of their souls.

Remark, too, how far-reaching is the authority of the Holy Ghost over the soul. No earthly king looks for obedience from his subjects except in exterior things. But exterior things are the smallest part of the obedience which His subjects render to the Holy Spirit. They must obey even in the secret of their hearts. Their affections must be conformed to the will of their Divine Ruler and their desires—they may not even dwell in thought, with deliberate complacency, on what it would be wrong for them to do.

And what is still more wonderful is that this obedience is accorded freely. This is the glory of the Divine King of souls, that His subjects obey Him of their own free choice. Earthly rulers receive obedience from their subjects because it is their present interest to obey; there are rewards for the submissive, there are punishments for those who rebel. But the force with which the Holy Ghost rules those who are subject to Him is wholly moral. It is true that He has His punishments and His rewards, but they do not belong, at least for the most part, to this present life, and are known only by faith. Besides, He will not accept the service which is rendered solely through fear of punishment or hope of reward,—it is unworthy of Him. He must be served for love, and this is most wonderful of all, that He has so many subjects who give Him the service of love which He desires.

To conclude, let us ask ourselves the question: Are we of the number of those in whom the Holy Ghost reigns, and who render Him loving obedience? Happy are we if our conscience can answer "Yes" to this question.

But let us go further still. Let us ask ourselves: Do we render to this Divine King, who rules within us, all the obedience which He desires of us, and which He has a right to expect from His creatures? To this question we can hardly return an affirmative answer, for

there must be many points in which we fall short of that exact submission which we owe to the Holy Spirit.

If we know ourselves as we are, we must confess that in many things we fail in obedience to His express will, as we know it through the authority of His Church, or, at least, that our obedience is slow, imperfect, and grudgingly accorded. We must own, also, that we are often inattentive to His Divine voice when it speaks within us, reminding us of our duties, and teaching us what He requires of us. And we must acknowledge that we are careless of knowing what is the good pleasure of this Divine King, and act independently as if we owed no submission to Him.

Let us confess the Holy Ghost to be truly the King of our souls by the right of His own Divine nature. And since He is pleased also to reign in us by virtue of our choice, let us invite Him to rule over us, and subdue all our passions to Himself, until nothing be found within us that is not perfectly conformed to His most holy will.

# Catholic Sermons

BY REV. J. B. BAGSHAWE.

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## SERMON XXXIII.

### *The Communion of Saints.*

BY REV. A. B. GURDON.

"But you are come to Mount Sion, and to the city of the Living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to the company of many thousands of angels, and to the Church of the first-born, who are written in the heavens, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of the just made perfect" (Heb. xii. 22—23).

How significant are these words of St. Paul! Take notice: he does not say "You *will* come, when you die, to the city of the living God," but "you *are* come, now, while you are alive."

And in another place (Eph. ii. 19) he says: "Now, therefore, you are no more strangers and foreigners; but you *are* fellow-citizens with the saints, and the domestics of God."

Let us, then, examine this doctrine of the Communion of Saints, which, the apostle tells us, immediately concerns us, and which, as you all know, forms an article of the creed we profess.

First of all, what is the meaning of the word "saints"? When we speak of the saints, we generally mean those blessed ones who have attained the reward of their labours, and who are reigning with Christ in heaven; but that is only partially the meaning of the word here. By "saints" are meant all the members of Christ's Church, who, by Baptism, *are called* to be saints, whether they have arrived at that perfection, or no. And this family of Christ is distributed in three different places. That branch of it, which is still living on the earth, is called the Church militant, or fighting; because they are still fighting their way to heaven against the world, the devil, and their passions. Another branch is called the Church suffering; because



they are expiating in purgatory the faults committed in this life, and are waiting for their eternal reward : and the third branch is called the Church triumphant ; because they are triumphing with Christ in heaven.

Now let us see what we mean by the word "Communion." It means having mutual intercourse, and participating in mutual benefits.

So we read that the members of the Church at Jerusalem, in primitive times, had communion with one another in worldly goods. They all shared and shared alike—what belonged to one belonged to another. In like manner, the one family of Jesus Christ, in the three places, share and share alike in the spiritual goods of the Church, and St. Paul beautifully explains this, by comparing the members of the Church to the members of the human body, and showing how, just as though the head is a long way off the foot, and the thigh bone a much more important member than a tooth, nevertheless they are knit together in the closest union, are nourished by the same blood, and have the keenest sympathy one with another ; so one may be a very small member of the Church of God compared with another, and may be in a totally different place, and yet be in the most perfect communion with it.

What, then, are these spiritual goods of the Church ? We may sum them up briefly as follows :—The merits of Jesus Christ, our Blessed Lady, and the Saints ; the Sacraments, the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, prayers, and good works.

These treasures of the Church are the common property of all her members, wherever they may be. The family on earth stretches out one hand to the family in purgatory, and the other to the family in heaven. Thanksgiving, prayer, satisfactions, helps, inspirations, faith, hope, love—all permeate from one to the other.

Perhaps, my brethren, you will ask at the outset, "Can a member of the Church on earth, who is so unhappy as to be in mortal sin, have any part in the "Communion of Saints" ?

Yes, he can, provided he is not excommunicated; for, although he is indeed a dead and withered branch on God's vine, and incapable of merit himself, he may be profited by the merits of others. He may be quickened to repentance by the inspirations obtained for him by the prayers of the saints; the efficacy of the Holy Mass may be applied to him for the softening of his hard heart, and the faith, which is not extinguished in him, may be the chain by which his brethren, in heaven or purgatory, may win for him the graces of forgiveness and final perseverance.

Let us now examine the Communion of Saints under its various aspects. We will consider (1) the communion the faithful on earth enjoy with one another, (2) with the holy souls in purgatory, and (3) with the Church triumphant in heaven.

Then, we will look into the communion of the holy souls with each other, with earth, and with heaven; and, lastly, the communion which the blessed saints enjoy.

If we look into Holy Scripture, the history of the Church, and the lives of the saints, we see what stress is laid on the intercommunion of God's servants on earth.

In the Old Testament, we find Abraham and Job, Moses and Aaron, and Samuel, Tobias, Judith, and Esther, all praying for their friends or nation, and God accepting their prayers, and making His Providences dependant upon them.

In the New Testament, our Blessed Lord tells us that whenever we meet *together* in His Name, He will be in the midst of us. He enjoins us to pray for our enemies. He Himself gave us the example of praying for His apostles, His Church, and His murderers.

And we see this example followed by His saints. St. Stephen prayed for his persecutors. St. Paul not only prayed himself, but commended himself to the prayers of others. "Brethren," he says, "pray for us" (1 Thess. v. 25). Nor is it only by prayers, but by the merits, and even the companionship of the just on earth, are the faithful benefited.

When St. Paul was in danger of shipwreck on his way to Rome, he was able to tell his fellow voyagers that "God had given him all those that sailed with him," and, as it turned out, "every soul got safe to land." "See," says St. Chrysostom, "what it is to be in the companionship of saints."

Now, dear brethren, let us for a moment pause, and see what is our practice in relation to these great truths.

Have we a tender feeling towards Catholics *as such*? Where are our interests and our sympathies? The "household of faith" was regarded by St. Paul as the object of his first solicitude. Is it so with us?

Alas! how many Catholics show all their enthusiasm *out of the family!*

The fortunes of the Holy See; the missionary enterprises of the Church; the conversion, even, of our countrymen; are all as nothing to them, while the last newspaper gossip, or little local rumours, usurp all their thoughts, their words, and their energies. By becoming members of confraternities, or tertiaries of orders, we have a share in all the good works, penances, and "intentions" of our brethren. How few care to belong to them! How few, even when they do belong to them—by wearing the scapular, for instance—care to fulfil the obligations by which they gain the indulgences!

Let us now contemplate the communion of the Church on earth with the holy souls in purgatory. There is no necessity, dear brethren, for me to remind you of the *immense power* God has put into our hands with regard to them. Every prayer-book is full of indulgenced prayers *applicable to the dead*. Masses, Communions, alms, acts of self-denial—in fact, good works of every kind may be offered up to God in their behalf. The natural feeling of tenderness for their memory, and compassion for their sufferings, is made supernatural, by the action of the Church, putting into our mouths words which not only do them good, but also glorify God, and sanctify ourselves.

But it is not on *our* side of the question, my brethren, that I wish so much to speak. Every heart knows its own interest in that holy place of love and pain. Every heart "knows its own bitterness," and God, who is "greater than our hearts," knows "all things," even more than we can express. Each one has his own "soul" to care for and pray for. Parent, husband, wife, child, friend—how clearly their memories stand out before us!—how can we ever forget them! What secrets between them and us and God! It is not, then, for me to suggest what your own hearts would say much more eloquently, but, as I said before, to tell *their* side of the question. Now, first of all, we may notice that there are many things of the greatest importance to us, which God has not chosen to reveal definitely and in detail. Although we have the inestimable privilege of being in the Catholic Church, where we are all taught definitely what to do, and what to believe—not "tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine"—yet there are many things God would have us think about, the details of which are left to our devotion and meditation. And, perhaps, it is on this very account—that we might think about them more—that God has said so little about them. Such, for instance, is the reward of heaven. Our Lord said very little about heaven, but does He not wish us to think a great deal of it? Again, we know very little about our Blessed Lady's life, but from that little does not our Lord wish us to make a great deal by meditation? So, too, with regard to the holy dead. Very little is defined concerning them. We know that there is a purgatory; but what the life of a soul without the body is—what it suffers, how it suffers—is not revealed to us. And yet how we should like to know! Above all, what do they think of *us*? Do they remember us, as we remember them? Do they love us as they did? Do they know what we are doing all through those long weary waiting years, till we meet as we daily hope and pray to do?

Now, dear brethren, our Lord knew that we should



ask these questions, and yet He has not chosen to answer them distinctly and directly. He has, however, *implied an answer*. When He spoke that parable of the rich man and Lazarus, He drew the veil aside from the other world, and described something of the state of the damned. How fearful is the picture of that miserable man buried in hell! Tormented in flame, he cries out for Lazarus to dip the tip of his fingers in water in order to cool his tongue.

And yet, mark, in the midst of his torments this damned lost soul thought of those he had loved on earth. The water had been refused to him, but would Lazarus go to his father's house, where he had five brethren, and testify to them that they came not to that place of torments? What a picture! He had been accustomed to purple and fine linen, and feasting sumptuously every day, and now he was in cruel, unaccustomed pain; but still he remembered, so carefully, too, *five* brethren—none forgotten—and he was a damned soul, too!

Now, does not our Lord wish us to see, by this parable, much concerning the disembodied state? First of all, the soul when it leaves the body, though it changes its place, does not change its nature. The soul remembers clearly what took place in the body. His "father's house" was present to him. Then, whatever the torments of the future life are, they are not of a kind to distract from other thoughts and other interests. Moreover, may we not guess at a certain knowledge which is imparted to souls in the disembodied state? "A tardy teacher," says St. Ambrose, "that rich man begins to be, who now has neither the opportunity for learning, nor for teaching."

Now, if these things are told about a man concerning whom there is almost universal consent, that he was intended to be described as in hell, and not in purgatory, how much more can we realize the feeling of the holy souls for those they knew and loved on earth!

They have seen Jesus Christ at the particular judgment, and in that glance they have not only learned a

secret of sanctity as respects themselves, but as respects others also. If they were anxious for our salvation before, how much more now? If they unselfishly forgot their own sufferings to relieve ours when on earth, how much more unselfishly now, when the valley of tears, which this earth is called, is so much more clearly now a valley of tears to them than ever?

Nor does the Church forbid us to ask for their prayers, though they have not yet attained to their rest. Many holy and learned men have done so. It is not only to the dead canonized saints that we may pray, but to *our own dead* also, whom we have seen pass away from us in all their imperfections, whom we can trust, most of all, to know us and our dangers. But while they are praying, my brethren, what do they see? Do they see those whom they love so dearly, out of the grace of God? What an increase of pain to them! Or, if not so bad as that, do they see us leading a neglectful, tepid life, without prayer, without watchfulness, with unguarded tongues, shedding, perhaps, idle tears over their graves, and leaving undone the one thing necessary for which they are yearning?

But, before we leave this beautiful sad region of purgatory, let us not forget the communion which the holy souls enjoy with the saints in heaven. In what this consists, as I said before, we do not definitely know, for the Holy Ghost has not told us; but there are many indications of a communion which we should do well to meditate upon.

First of all, our Blessed Lady is called the Queen of Purgatory, which implies that she exercises a power of mercy in her realm. Those many various prayers addressed to her and other saints, interceding for the holy souls, and calling for aid in their behalf, are sanctioned and blessed by the Church. Above all, once more referring to the parable of the rich man, we may be quite sure that if the damned, in spite of the great "chasm" between them, can correspond with the saints in rest, as Dives did with Abraham, much more is tender sympathy exhibited by the saints reigning in glory to those of

their brethren who are also saints, and confirmed in grace and safety for ever.

Let us now turn our attention to the relations in which we on earth stand to the saints in heaven.

In the first times heaven was sealed to earth. Jacob, indeed, saw "a ladder standing upon the earth, and the top thereof touching heaven; the angels also of God ascending and descending by it" (Gen. xxviii. 12); but heaven itself was not accessible to the children of men till our Lord opened its gates to all believers. The veil between the Holy of Holies and the holy place has now been burst asunder, and we are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints and the domestics of God.

And more than this. St. Paul (1 Cor. iv. 9) tells us that we are "made a spectacle not only to the world, but to angels and men." That is to say, all that we do in this battle of life—our combats, our victories, our defeats, our bravery, our cowardice, our fidelity, our treason—all passes before heavenly witnesses, all is seen by intensely-interested eyes, all watched by hearts full of love and anxiety, and eyes and hearts, remember, that "never sleep nor slumber."

You have all heard, probably, of that "Charge of the Light Brigade" in the valley of Balaclava, which forms one of the grandest episodes in the Crimean war. Do you not suppose that the ardour of that brave little band was immensely excited by the fact that the armies of England and France were watching them from the heights above? So with us in our contest with the enemies of our souls. We are in the valley beneath charging the enemy, and on the hill-tops are our brave comrades and their great General witnessing our exploits.

And here, my brethren, another thought presents itself. *Our real life begins when we die.* This is only the probationary, play life. "All the world's a stage," and we are the players. There are some whose business it is to appear in grand dresses, and others in quite humble attire. Some represent the kings and queens of

the play, and some the labourers, and valets, and grave-diggers. It matters not what our part has been in the play, so long as we play well. When the curtain falls, and the play is over, and the actors are all "themselves" again, the king takes off his crown and his brilliant robes, and the clown his rough dress, and the only questions asked are, "Who played the best?"

You know, dear brethren, who the Great Manager of *our* play is; and the saints and angels are the keen, though loving, critics, as the audience. What a spectacle to them must be the conduct of some actors!

Here one may be seen refusing to take any part in the performance at all, and here some who are bent on taking the king or queen's part themselves, and so spoiling the whole plot of the play, and bringing contempt and indignation upon all they do! Fancy a man on the stage struggling to possess himself of another actor's part and neglecting his own, causing endless confusion and making the piece an utter failure! And yet the saints and angels see much of this in *our* play.

There is no necessity, my brethren, to prove to you that the saints in heaven know of what is going on here, and that they are able and willing to help us with their prayers; but let us analyze this intercessory power of theirs. St. John, in the Apocalypse (ii. 26), tells us that our Lord promised to "him that should overcome" that He would give him "power over the nations."

What is this power? It is principally intercession. *Intercession is their constant employment.* Their entrance into heaven is owing to their oneness with Jesus. As heaven was shut before, so it is only open by complete oneness with Him. The saved are to sit upon *His* throne and be busied with *His* occupation. And what is His occupation? Perpetual intercession. He is the one Mediator—ever pleading for man, with His open wounds, to His Heavenly Father. The time will come when prayer will cease and be swallowed up in praise; but now the one voice of Heaven is prayer. And what Jesus does the saints must do, for they are one with Him.



Again, they are not there as individuals only, but as the "Church of the first-born." God's order is their condition. And how can they communicate with the absent except by prayer?

*Intercession is also their willing worship.* God's view is their view—God's will their will; and His will is our sanctification. Their worship also consists of imitation of the Holy Trinity, whom they ever gaze upon in the Beatific Vision. They imitate the Father's love by listening to the children's cry below; they imitate the love of the Holy Spirit by their love for each other, and by brooding in ecstasy over the creation which God has blessed; and they imitate the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, who "for us men and for our salvation descended." They, too, "descend" and take part in our salvation. Their worship of His interests forces them to an impetuous descent. How beautifully is this described in the Holy Scripture, where the dead Onias, who had been high priest, "holding up his hands, prayed for all the people of the Jews;" and again, "there appeared also another man, admirable for age and glory, and environed with great beauty and majesty: This is a lover of his brethren, and of the people of Israel: this is he that prayeth much for the people, and for all the holy city, Jeremias the prophet of God" (2 Macc. xv. 13, 14).

What "power over the nations" was here! Once more, let us look at their worship of the Divine Attribute of Mercy. It is the devotion of Heaven, and yet there are none among that shining multitude to show mercy to! They turn to earth. They see the yearning mercy of God and the wants of men, and their worship becomes a prayer.

And do they not long also to hasten the kingdom of God? If "Thy kingdom come" is an appointed prayer of earth, how much more of Heaven? They interpret the faltering accents of earth-bound creatures. They look at the vacant thrones, made vacant by Lucifer's pride, and pray for the final victory, when God shall be all and all, and His enemies under His footstool.

Lastly, *intercession is their endless reward*. All natural love which God has founded and blessed will here find its complete fruition. The baptized infant, upon whom first dawned in heaven the love of kindred intended by its Maker, will be able to repay the watchful care bestowed upon it in life—the bitter agony of the last parting. It is admitted to the full science of the saints. It knows all now, and intercession is its reward. And those, too, to whom we have been guides on earth—whom we have comforted with our sympathy, our advice, our charity—now that they have “power over the nations,” with what magnificent generosity will they not repay it? To watch and wait and pray for us is at once the “joy of their Lord,” and their own joy as well. And now, dear brethren, what effect should these thoughts have upon our own lives? We cannot be units, you see, any longer. We are fellow-citizens with the saints—their home is our home—their Father our Father—their Mother our Mother. They descend on heaven’s stair to relieve and aid us, and what are the messages that we send back? Perhaps we have hitherto neglected them. We “have no particular devotion to any saint,” we say. Ought this to be so? There are our name saints—the saints of our Baptism and Confirmation. Do we pray to them? Do we try and know something of their lives? They know a great deal of our lives, and are ever praying for us. There is our guardian angel, who has never left us, though he ever beholds the face of our Father in heaven. There are the saints of our country—that “nation” over which they have “power.” There are the saints of our own sex, condition of life, circumstances—those who have grieved as we have grieved, and had to fight the same battle that we are fighting—have we made use of them?

The Scripture (Dan. x. 13) tells us of holy contests among the blessed angels in their anxiety for their clients; and we are busied in contests for place and reputation, and eating and drinking, and “getting on in the world!”

What a contrast ! Let us try and see, as we are seen. And should not the thought of the Communion of Saints quicken our energies in running the way of God's commandments ?

How can we be "weary of well-doing" when we reflect on the end of well-doing ? All Saints' Day is the Church's great day of justification. She points to the glory of the family in heaven—of all those, known and unknown—and contrasts it with the fleeting pleasures, the barren honours we are asked to give up now, in order to possess it in our turn. "Wisdom is justified of her children." And now, last of all, people sometimes tell us, in this Protestant country of ours, that our religion is a very losing concern—that we are quite in the minority—very unpopular—not likely to make our way, and so on ; and it may be that we are at times discouraged by a sense of isolation. Oh ! my brethren, when thus you are tempted, lift up your eyes, and think of the Communion of Saints. Long ago there was just such a timid servant of God. When the Prophet Eliseus was on earth we are told that the King of Syria was determined to catch him, and despatched chariots and horsemen to beset the city of Dothan, where he was living. And the servant of Eliseus rose in the morning, and saw this mighty host, and he cried out, "Alas ! alas ! alas ! my lord, what shall we do ?" And his master showed him the mountain round about "full of horses and chariots of fire," and he said to him, "Fear not, for there are more with us than with them" (4 Kings vi. 15, 16, 17). Fear not, dear brethren ; *there are more with us than with them !* Fervent Catholics are in the majority. *They* can hardly be called "separated," whose home already is Mount Sion, and an innumerable company of angels. *They* may well bear to be "unpopular," whose devoted adherents are the Kings of Heaven and the spirits of the just made perfect !

# Catholic Sermons

BY REV. J. B. BAGSHAWE.

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## SERMON XXXIV.

### *Divine Grace.*

“By the grace of God I am what I am : and His grace in me hath not been void” (1 Cor. xv. 10).

IN these few words of St. Paul, my dear brethren, we have before us the whole Catholic doctrine about Divine Grace. They explain to us the absolute necessity of grace. “I am what I am :”—all the merit and excellence which the apostle possessed before God came—not from his own work—not from his labours and sufferings—but from God’s grace and favour ; but, again, man’s co-operation is necessary likewise, because God does not work in us except by our own consent. “His grace in me hath not been void.” I have not made void the grace of God by refusing to work with it ; the grace of God, therefore, however abundant, is not sufficient by itself, but requires a corresponding effort on the part of him who receives it, otherwise it will produce no effect.

I propose to speak of the Sacraments, which are channels of God’s grace ; and before I commence that subject it is necessary to explain, as carefully as I can, what grace is, how we are to obtain it, and how to correspond with what we receive.

What is Divine Grace ? It is the great spiritual bond by which men are united to God in the supernatural order, and are dependent upon Him, by which He holds the reins, if we may say so, and rules perpetually over the hearts of His creatures.

In the order of nature, not only every living being, but every inanimate object, is encompassed by God, and moves by His power ; there are a thousand different subordinate forces, but it is His power which acts in



them all, in a multitude of different channels, under different names, and according to different laws; but still it is His power. "The Father worketh until now, and I work." If for one moment the power of the Creator ceased to sustain the works of His hands, all creatures would perish. "But if Thou turn away Thy face, they shall be troubled: Thou shalt take away their breath, and they shall fail, and shall return to their dust" (Ps. ciii. 29).

So it is in the supernatural order; the energy by which the soul acts, the first impulse and the sustaining power, and the ultimate completion must come from God, and without Him nothing can be done. "For it is God in you both to will and to accomplish, according to His good will" (Phil. ii. 13). Yet more; God acts in His material creation, and does everything by His own power, and yet leaves His creatures free to follow the laws of their own being, so as to guide them without doing violence to the nature which He has given to them; so in the spiritual kingdom He influences the hearts of men without interfering with their free will. He moves, assists, and sustains them by His grace, and makes it the rein by which the moral world is guided; but He does not compel. His work is done in, and through His creatures, and is always dependent upon them for co-operation.

The word grace means favour, and, therefore, always implies something which is not a *right*, but a *gift*, and by it we generally mean supernatural favours, or something connected with the next world. Some supernatural graces are in the miraculous order, such as were the gift of tongues bestowed upon the apostles, but grace, in its ordinary signification, means the interior and spiritual gifts bestowed upon men to make them pleasing in the sight of God.

The first thing we have to remember is the absolute necessity of grace. No words can express this so strongly as those of our Lord, when He says: "As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abide in the vine, so neither can you, unless you abide in me.

I am the vine, you the branches: he that abideth in me and I in him, the same beareth much fruit: for without me you can do nothing. If any one abide not in me, he shall be cast forth as a branch and shall wither, and they shall gather him up and cast him into the fire, and he burneth" (St. John xv. 4). Nothing can more forcibly express the utter powerlessness of man to work for his salvation by his own unassisted efforts than this comparison. He is unable to make a beginning—he cannot move on, one step; and, especially, he cannot persevere to the end without the assistance of Divine Grace: as St. Paul tells us, "No man can say, the Lord Jesus, but by the Holy Ghost" (1 Cor. xii. 3); and, "Not that we are sufficient to think anything of ourselves, as of ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God" (2 Cor. iii. 5). "Unless the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it; unless the Lord keep the city, he watcheth in vain that keepeth it" (Ps. cxxvi. 1.) It is vain for us to imagine that we can build up any structure of goodness and holiness unless God's grace builds it up for us, and it is to no purpose that we watch to preserve ourselves from evil, unless the grace of God keeps us from it.

God's grace, however, is always given to us when we need it. "Of His fulness we all have received, and grace for grace" (St. John i. 16). No one can ever say that he fell into sin because grace was wanting to him, and power was not given to him to resist temptation. Our Lord is the "true light that enlighteneth every man who cometh into this world;" and He either actually gives to each one the grace necessary for him under the circumstances in which he is placed, or gives him the means of obtaining it if he chooses. "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in infirmity" (2 Cor. xii. 9). This was the answer which our Lord made to St. Paul, when he was wearied by grievous temptation, and it is the answer He gives to all of us. However great may be the difficulties which you have to encounter—however sharp the temptation—the grace of God is sufficient for you. It does not

matter whether the temptation arises from external circumstances or from old habits, or the immediate suggestions of the devil—the grace which you receive will enable you to overcome it, if only you do your part.

We have abundant illustrations of this in the lives of the saints, as well as in common life. How great must have been the graces given to the martyrs to enable them to win their crowns! It would have been impossible for any one of that great crowd of martyrs, who “came out of great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the Blood of the Lamb,” to have persevered without a strong sustaining grace from Almighty God. As the need increased, and the difficulties grew more overwhelming, so did the supernatural help afforded to the saints increase with it—and, in the end, grace was victorious.

St. Paul says: “Let no temptation take hold on you but such as is human, and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted above that which you are able, but will make also with temptation issue, that you may be able to bear it” (1 Cor. x. 13). In whatever circumstances we are placed, we have a right, therefore, to reckon with confidence on the grace of God to enable us to be victorious over temptation, if only we are prepared to correspond with the grace He gives us—“being confident of this very thing, that He who hath begun a good work in you will perfect it unto the day of Christ Jesus” (Phil. i. 6).

God gives His grace to all men, and this grace is able to produce the greatest results, but it will not act by itself. It is absolutely necessary that we should correspond with the grace given to us, and not make it “void” by our want of good will—“His grace in me hath not been void.” St. Paul had received the most powerful, the most special graces that could be given to any man: his calling was a miracle of God’s grace, and yet he clearly shows us that all this *might* have been void, and would have produced no effect, if he had refused His co-operation. He, therefore, says to the Christian converts at Corinth: “And we, helping, do

exhort you that you receive not the grace of God in vain" (2 Cor. vi. 1).

You have, no doubt, my dear brethren, often heard the well-known words: "God made you without your consent, and redeemed you without your consent; but He will not save you without your consent." Whatever graces God may give you, He will certainly not *compel* you to be good; and, therefore, the greatest and most important work of man is to co-operate zealously with the grace which God gives.

I have now to dwell on the great division of grace, without knowing which you cannot possibly understand the subject. It is clear that the word "grace" is constantly used in two quite different senses—that is, to express two things which are perfectly distinct. These two things are "actual grace" and "habitual grace:"—they are closely connected, because actual grace is intended to lead us to habitual grace, or to maintain us in it; but, in themselves, they are entirely different.

Actual grace is the help of God; it is that interior impulse to do good and to avoid evil, without which there can be no spiritual act of any supernatural reward. This interior impulse is to our souls what the sap is to the branch of the vine: if the sap and vital force are not supplied to it, the branch cannot bring forth fruit; and so, if the spiritual and supernatural impulse be not communicated by God, there can be no spiritual fruit, since "the branch cannot bear fruit of itself."

This "helping" grace it is of which St. Paul speaks when he says: "I can do all things in Him who strengtheneth me," (Phil iv. 13); and again, when he tells us to "be strengthened in the Lord and the might of His power. Put you on the armour of God that you may be able to stand against the deceits of the devil: for our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers; against the rulers of the world of this darkness; against the spirits of wickedness in the high places" (Eph. vi. 10). It is called "actual" grace, because it is a mere *passing*



grace—a help which God bestows on us to enable us to perform that *act* of the will by which we do the good or avoid the evil which is presented to us. The fruits produced by the help of actual grace remain: “I have chosen you . . . that you should bring forth fruit, and your fruit should remain” (St. John xv. 16); but the impulse of grace which produced it passes away with the act that is completed. It is also called preventing grace—that is, a grace *going before*—because it is the divine impulse from which all good actions take their rise: for “it is God who worketh in you both to will and to accomplish, according to His good will” (Phil. ii. 13).

We may again distinguish actual graces into several kinds; besides the general assistance given to all, there are the graces given to different states of life, or special inspirations, and assistances granted according to the wants of those called to them; and there is, besides, a sacramental grace, or a special assistance given by Almighty God to carry out the end for which the sacraments were instituted. Actual grace is given by Almighty God to all men: to some, indeed, it is bestowed more efficaciously than on others, but it is given in a sufficient measure to all; it is the means by which creatures are drawn to their Creator, and God gives what is necessary to every one of them, “dividing to each one according to His will.”

The grace which He gives has within it, moreover, a power of increase and expansion—like the fire which spreads rapidly through the reeds. A little fire, if it takes hold, soon becomes a mighty blaze; and a little grace given by God, if properly corresponded with, soon brings greater graces. Every illumination which God gives to us contains in itself the beginning of a brighter and clearer light, and it is our own fault if the graces which we receive do not lead us on to something higher.

We cannot illustrate this better than by the history of the star which called the wise men out of the East and led them to Bethlehem; indeed, it would almost seem as if this star had been intended to explain the ordinary course of God’s call to man. The star appeared

to the wise men in the East, and they followed it, not knowing, and perhaps not considering, whither it was to lead them; all that they knew and saw, at the moment, was the duty of following. They followed it, therefore, in spite of all the difficulties of their path—over mountains and river, through strange countries and into distant lands, and it led them first to Jerusalem, and then to our Lord—and, “seeing the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. And entering in, they found the Child with Mary, His Mother” (St. Mat. ii. 10). The duty of all mankind is to imitate the example of these wise men, and follow the light of God’s grace as it is given to them. It may be faint and obscure at starting, but as we follow it becomes clearer and brighter, and, certainly, will never abandon us until it brings us to the vision of God: “Send forth Thy light and Thy truth: they have conducted me and brought me unto the holy hill and into Thy tabernacles” (Ps. xlii. 3).

People sometimes complain of a want of light, and say that God’s grace has been sparingly bestowed on them; but the reason of this is generally plain enough; it is that they have taken little or no trouble to correspond with the graces actually given, and, as they have received them in vain, God has given them no more. The Holy Scripture says: “A good understanding to all that do it” (Ps. cx. 10); and if you take little pains to *do*, you cannot complain if God gives you but little light to understand.

The effects of Divine Grace upon those who receive it worthily are wonderful and magnificent. “God is wonderful in His saints.” “I can do *all* things in Him that strengtheneth me,” says the apostle; and there are no difficulties, exterior or interior, which grace cannot overcome; there are no heights of sanctity which it will not achieve. The saints were mortal men like ourselves, and yet God raised them so high, and made them stand before Him for ever in His glory, to show us what His grace could accomplish. The grace of God is the seed which is sown in our hearts, which, falling upon good ground, will spring up and “produce fruit a hundred-

fold,"—not the mere pretence of fruit, but fruit really excellent in the sight of God, because it is the true "fruit of the vine" produced by the branches that "abide in the vine." Grace is the "Word of God, living and effectual, and more piercing than any two-edged sword, and reaching unto the division of the soul and the spirit of the joints also, and of the marrow" (Heb. iv. 2) : it is the word of God, spoken not to the outward ear, but to the inward soul, and able to produce in that soul wonders of courage and patience, wonders of zeal and piety, and every virtue of which the human soul is capable.

God will, some day, ask us to give an account of all the things He has given us in this life: "Give an account of thy stewardship, for now thou canst be steward no longer." We shall then have to show what use we have made of all the talents entrusted to us, and, most of all, shall we be called upon to account for the many graces which we have received. Happy will it be for us if we are able to say with St. Paul: "His grace in me hath not been void."

I now come to speak of the other kind of grace to which actual grace leads us when we correspond with it. This grace is "habitual or sanctifying" grace, and is, indeed, "the charity of God poured forth in our hearts by the Holy Ghost who is given to us" (Rom. v. 5). Habitual grace brings with it the "favour and friendship of God!" if you have it, you thereby become the friend and child of God; if you have it not, you are His enemy. Our Lord says: "If any man love me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and will make our abode with him" (St. John xiv. 23). It is by habitual grace that God dwells in our hearts and abides with us, not for a few moments, but permanently, unless we shut the door of our hearts against Him.

It is called "habitual" grace because it is a *habit* or permanent quality in the soul. We cannot better illustrate the qualities of habitual grace than by comparing it to the wedding garment in which all the guests in our

Lord's parable were expected to be clad. A king invited a multitude to his banquet, "the poor and the feeble, the blind and the lame;" but each one who took his place at that table must be clothed in the "wedding garment," by which alone he could be rendered worthy of that royal presence. Oh! how beautiful must that garment of Divine Grace be, which can make the poor, miserable, and sinful children of men fit members of that kingdom in which God reigns with His saints! How precious must the raiment be which can cover over all the stains and miseries of human wretchedness, and make men worthy of the love of their infinite Creator! Nothing can do this but the garment of Divine Grace, which shines with the Precious Blood of Christ.

The grace of God is not, however, a mere garment; it does not merely cover over the wickedness and filth of sin, so as to make that which is foul within appear beautiful to the eye; it does not leave the soul to be a "whited sepulchre;" but the touch of this garment carries with it a complete and perfect soundness. It does not merely *call* sinners just, but it makes them "holy and unspotted in His sight in charity" (Eph. i. 4).

We may, also, compare habitual grace to a light. "Let your loins be girt, and lamps burning in your hands, and you yourselves like men who wait for their Lord when he shall return from the wedding" (St. Luke xii. 35). What, my dear brethren, is the lamp which each one of you must hold in his hand when his Lord shall come? Is it not the lamp of that Divine charity by which alone you can be acceptable to Him? Our Lord tells us Himself that the kingdom of heaven is "like to ten virgins who, taking their lamps, went out to meet the bridegroom and the bride, and five of them were foolish and five wise . . . and at midnight there was a cry made: Behold, the bridegroom cometh: go ye forth to meet him. Then all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps" (St. Matt. 25). When we "go forth" to meet the bridegroom, we must carry with us that Divine light with which our Lord has enlightened



our souls, and present it to Him, who was Himself "the true light which enlighteneth every man that cometh into this world" (St. John i. 9).

I have said that actual grace is a passing grace, which helps us in our work, and then leaves us; but habitual grace is a permanent and lasting gift, as we may learn from the comparisons that have been used. It is a garment which clothes us when once we have put it on, until we remove it, and a light which burns till we extinguish it by our own fault. It is a grace which we could never deserve for ourselves, but is freely given to us by our Lord when we are baptized, since we are "justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Rom. iii. 24); and no one can take it away from us. Day and night, sleeping and waking, at all times and in all places, we remain clothed with this wedding garment, till by our own deliberate act we cast it off. Even then our Lord is always willing to restore it to us, if we will turn back to Him; and He is not only ready to restore to us once more the "first robe," but He is continually urging us on to come to Him to receive it.

Let us now consider the marvellous effects of habitual grace upon our souls. It is called sanctifying grace, because it necessarily makes all those who possess it holy and pleasing to God; the greatest sinner, no matter what his crimes may have been, is at once purified from all mortal sin, and made the child of God, if only this supernatural gift, this "Charity of God," enters into his soul: "if your sins be as scarlet, they shall be made as white as snow; and if they be as red as crimson, they shall be white as wool" (Is. i. 18). The sanctifying grace of God is incompatible with mortal sin; and one mortal sin must necessarily drive away God's grace; and, in the same way, the grace of God entering the soul must at once purify it from all mortal sin.

The grace which cleanses us from sin, and makes us holy and pleasing to God, makes us also the heirs of heaven. Grace is God's free gift, but with it He bestows a *right* to an eternal reward; so that, from the moment

we are baptized, if only we can “keep our baptism so as to be without blame,” and carry the white garment “without stain before the judgment-seat of our Lord Jesus Christ,” we have a claim upon that eternal inheritance. With the sanctifying grace given to us in baptism we have “received the spirit of adoption of sons, whereby we cry Abba: Father. For the Spirit Himself giveth testimony to our spirit that we are the sons of God. And if sons, heirs also: heirs, indeed, of God, and joint heirs with Christ” (Rom. viii. 17). If we are sons of God by the gift of Divine Grace, we have also necessarily the right to reign with Him in His kingdom—therefore was it that St. Paul says: “There is laid for me a crown, which the Lord, the just Judge, will render to me in that day” (2 Tim. iv. 8). He has told us before that all that he had was the grace of God, something freely bestowed upon him by God’s bounty; but the crown of justice which corresponds to the graces he has received he claims as a right.

And now, my dear brethren, can we ever think enough of God’s grace? Can we ever value it as we ought? Without it we are simply powerless, since “all our sufficiency is from God;” but with it we can do everything. Can any diligence or care be too much to secure for ourselves this all-powerful help? And, especially, who can sufficiently esteem the royal gift of God’s friendship and the treasures and privileges which it carries with it? Sanctifying grace is, indeed, the greatest of all treasures; it is the pearl of great price which the merchant in the Gospel purchased at the cost of all that he had. We might well use of this divine charity, which is the cause and instrument of our sanctification, the words of Holy Scripture: “I preferred her before kingdoms and thrones, and esteemed riches nothing in comparison of her. Neither did I compare unto her any precious stones, for all gold, in comparison of her, is as a little sand, and silver, in respect to her, shall be counted as clay. I loved her above health and beauty, and chose to have her instead of light, for her light cannot be put out. Now, all good things came to me together with

her, and innumerable riches through her hands" (Wis. vii. 8).

If Christians only knew how much was meant by sanctifying grace, and how great were the treasures and privileges that were included in it, they would see that even these inspired words fell short of the truth.

Our Lord Himself tells us that He will "come like a thief in the night," and, if we are not found in a state of grace when He comes, there is no further hope for us. Only one question was asked: "How came you in here, not having on the wedding garment?" there was no room for explanation and excuse before the sentence came.

We must not be contented with merely watching over this treasure, and taking care that it is never snatched from our hands; we must use all diligence to increase it. Every day we may, if we will, add something to the treasure of Divine Grace: we may become more holy, and obtain a higher place in God's favour. Every step which we make in grace in this life means an advance of glory and blessedness in the life to come; it means that we shall see God more clearly, and enjoy Him more intensely for all eternity. Our object in this life, therefore, is not to be contented with the grace which we have, but to press on to obtain more, "forgetting the things that are behind, and stretching forth ourselves to those that are before" (Phil. iii. 13).

Our Lord says, "Every branch that beareth fruit He will purge it, that it may bring forth more fruit" (St. John xv. 2); and the object of all the graces given us is to enable us to bring forth more fruit, to give us a more abundant treasure of sanctifying grace.

It is for this end that everything in religion is designed, and for this especially that the Sacraments were instituted. If, then, my dear brethren, you would learn the value of the Sacraments which our Lord has appointed, you must first ask Him to teach you properly to esteem the great treasure of sanctifying grace which He has bestowed on you.

# Catholic Sermons

BY THE REV. J. B. BAGSHAWE.

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## SERMON XXXV.

### *The Sacraments.*

“You shall draw waters with joy out of the Saviour’s fountains” (Isaias xii. 3).

WE cannot make one step towards our eternal salvation without the assistance of divine grace. It is God, my dear brethren, who gives the power to make a beginning, and then strength to persevere. It is He who goes before our efforts by the inspirations of His grace, and then supplies the means by which His grace may be increased, and, finally, He completes His own good work in us by the gift of final perseverance, so that everything is due to Him. “For it is God who worketh in you both to will and to accomplish according to His good will” (Phil. ii. 13). It is plain, therefore, that our first duty is to look out for the means of grace which God has appointed, and to make diligent use of them. If men do not take the trouble to look for the help which God is ready to give them, it is clear that they cannot complain if they are left to themselves. It will be no excuse for us to say that we were too weak to do anything, if we are able to get the strength we require by using the proper means. We shall, therefore, be held responsible not only for the graces which we have received, but also for those which we *might* have had by using ordinary diligence.

Almighty God has left us thus dependent upon His grace, that we may be obliged constantly to look up to Him, as our Father, from whom all good comes. “Every best and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no change nor shadow of alteration” (St. James i. 17).

Our Lord tells us to pray every day for our daily



bread. "Give us this day our daily bread"—and, by this, He means not only the food to support our bodily life, but also the grace of God, which is necessary for the spiritual life of our souls.

There are two direct ways in which we may get the grace of God, and, besides these, is that indirect, but most efficacious, way of obtaining it, which consists in thankfulness for God's gifts, and diligent correspondence with the graces already received. To-day I shall speak of the direct means of grace, which are prayer and the Sacraments. These are both necessary; they are intended to work together, and supplement each other, and, as a rule, they cannot produce their proper effect except in union. There are, indeed, exceptional cases in which God will supply all that is needed to prayer alone; for example, when the Sacraments cannot be had, and, in the same way, there are occasions in which the Sacraments will confer grace on those who are unable to pray, as in the case of infants who are baptized, and, sometimes, of sick people who receive Extreme Unction.

These, however, are exceptions, and, as a rule, in an ordinary Christian life, prayer and the Sacraments must go together. If you were diligent in approaching the Sacraments, but prayed very little, you would receive very scanty graces from God, and would run great risk of receiving the Sacraments unworthily. On the other hand, if you said many prayers, but, at the same time, were negligent and cold in receiving the Sacraments; if you went very seldom to Confession and Communion, for instance, when you might go frequently if you liked, you would not get much answer to your prayers.

It is very common to hear people say that they do not get any great graces from the Sacraments—that their Confessions and Communions produce very little fruit, and that they do not appear to be much better for them. You will generally find that the reason of all this is, that they say so few prayers. Perhaps it will be found that they make a very hurried preparation for their Confession, or that they give very few minutes to devotion before and after Communion—perhaps,

indeed, hardly make any thanksgiving at all. In such cases they have not disposed themselves by prayer to receive much grace. Again, there are many people who pray very little in the ordinary course of daily life, and so do not allow themselves any opportunity of making *use* of the graces they have received.

Prayer and the Sacraments are both the means of grace, but they are widely different in their nature; indeed, they are, in most respects, a contrast. Prayer is the inward channel of God's grace, whereas the Sacraments are essentially external. It may seem strange to speak of prayer as something quite interior, when there are so many external things connected with it. There are, indeed, abundant outward forms of prayer, and helps to prayer—books, rosaries, pictures—and people join together to pray in common; but prayer itself is quite interior—it is “the raising up of the mind and heart to God.”

All the outward objects used are only useful in order to help us to lift up our hearts. They are like the scaffolding. When you mean to build a house, you put up scaffold-poles to help you to raise the walls, but the only use of these poles is that the wall inside them may be built. In the same way, books and pictures are meant to help you to lift up your mind and heart above this earth, and fix them upon God; and, if you do not do this, all the outward forms are useless.

If you saw a builder taking a great deal of trouble about his scaffolding, and building it up with great care and expense, and then paying very little attention to the building it was put up for—getting on very slowly with his walls and doing them very carelessly—you would say that he was acting in a very foolish manner, and did not know what he was about. This, however, is just what a good many people do about their prayers: they take a great deal of trouble about reciting forms of words, and using external assistances, but give very little thought to putting themselves into the presence of God, and raising up their minds to Him, and giving Him their hearts: whereas, the use of the external things

is simply to help us to raise up our hearts ; and without our hearts they are nothing. Do not those who act in this way deserve the reproach, " This people honoureth with their lips, but their heart is far from me " (St. Mat. xv. 8).

On the other hand, external aids to devotion are very important, and there are few of us who can do without them. It is only the saints and very spiritual people who can, at all times, raise their minds to God without help, and, therefore, we should diligently use the best forms of prayer, and especially those to which the Church has attached indulgences, and avail ourselves of all the external aids to recollection that we can get—remembering always, however, that their use is as instruments to raise our hearts to God.

" The Spirit breatheth where He will : and thou hearest His voice, but thou knowest not whence He cometh, and whither He goeth " (St. John iii. 8). It is a great comfort to know that God's grace is working throughout the whole of His creation, even amongst those out of the visible communion of His Church ; we rejoice to think that He hears and answers all the prayers made to Him with a good heart, and despises none of the works of His hands. May He complete His work, and bring all into the communion of His holy Church !

The Sacraments, on the other hand, are external ; they are outward things which have been appointed by God's Providence to be the means of grace. The grace they give is interior, but the Sacrament itself is necessarily something external.

Prayer, again, is a *general* source of grace, by which every individual, as an individual, applies to God as to his Father. It is the road open to every one of God's rational creatures ; they speak to Him, and He hears them. The language of every human heart is in the ears of the great Creator, no matter how poor and unknown the suppliant may be. " The prayer out of the mouth of the poor shall reach the ears of God, and judgment shall come for him speedily " (Eccl. xxi. 6) ;

and "The prayer of him that humbleth himself shall pierce the clouds, and till it come nigh he will not be comforted, and it will not depart till the Most High behold" (Eccl. xxxv. 21).

The Sacraments, however, are the special endowment of God's Church—that is, the special means of grace which our Lord has established to supply the wants of those who are the members of the Church He has established upon earth. The prophet Zachary says: "In that day there shall be a fountain open to the house of David, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem" (Zach. xiii. 1). The Sacraments are this open fountain—or, rather, they are the seven springs of that one great fountain of grace, the Precious Blood of our Lord; and they are for "the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem"—that is, they are reserved exclusively for those who have become members of the Church of Christ by Baptism. Baptism is the door by which men are admitted to the Sacraments, and no one who has not entered by that door can partake of the grace bestowed by them.

We have a twofold kind of relation to Almighty God—we are His children in right of our creation and redemption; and we are His children, in a higher sense, by special adoption as members of that corporate body which He has established upon earth, and it is as members of this body that we have a right to the grace of the Sacraments. These two relations do not interfere with one another; but, on the contrary, one is the completion and perfecting of the other. We need the help of prayer to enable us to receive the Sacraments, and we need sacramental grace to enable us to live up to the dignity of Christians to which we are called. Those who are out of the Church's pale can pray; God gives them the grace to pray, and hears their prayers; otherwise there would be no road open for their conversion. Moreover, He bestows upon them all the graces that they need, according to their necessities and dispositions of heart; but they cannot be partakers of the special grace of the Sacraments, because these are



the fountains provided for those only who are the actual members of the Christian Church.

But people will sometimes ask, "How comes it that there are any such external fountains of God's grace? How can such a spiritual thing—a thing which belongs so exclusively to the soul—be annexed to external actions, and to the use of purely material things, especially when our Lord says: The time cometh, and now is, when the true adorers shall adore the Father in spirit and in truth" ? (St. John iv. 24).

External Sacraments depend upon a visible Church. Without such a Church there can be no Sacraments; and, on the other hand, we can hardly imagine a visible Church to exist without something like Sacraments. Since it has pleased God to make His Church a visible, corporate body—a city set upon a hill—a fold in which His sheep are gathered together—it follows almost of necessity that in this Church there are sacramental forms. A number of men can only be bound up into a corporate body by external signs obvious to the senses, since men, as a society, cannot have any knowledge, or take any notice of things which are simply internal. The very idea of a body of men is of a number of men united together by some external, visible tie; and if this body of men is one united together, in virtue of a covenant which God has made with them, they must be united together by something which is an external sign of God's covenant. So it was in the Old Law: there were great sacramental rites by which God's people were united into one body—rites which signified the covenant of God with men, and which were, at the same time, the instruments of spiritual blessings to those who received them.

The New Law is, in a particular manner, the dispensation of grace, and therefore it is only natural to find that our Lord has willed that the very sacramental bonds by which men are united into one body should, at the same time, be the fountains of the special graces which it was the very object of His Church to bestow. Our Lord compares His Church to a fold, and He says:

“By me if any man enter in he shall be saved, and he shall go in and go out, and shall find pastures.” In these words He explains to us that, as members of the Church, we are not only to be visibly united, but are to have access to special pastures—that is, to the special means of grace which His bounty has prepared for all who are within the pale of His Church.

The members of the Church are united together in a special manner by the Sacraments which they receive in common; we are united by our spiritual birth in Baptism, by which we are made members one of another, “one Lord, one faith, one Baptism;” and, again, the Holy Eucharist, the great means by which spiritual life is to be maintained in us, is also the great bond of unity—the Holy “Communion;” “for we being many are one bread, one body, all that partake of one bread” (1 Cor. x. 17).

The Catechism tells us that “a Sacrament is an outward sign of inward grace, ordained by Jesus Christ, by which grace is given to our souls.” We have here the three conditions required for a Sacrament. It must be something *outward*—that is, something which we can see or hear, or which in some way comes under our senses; otherwise, it could not be a sign of grace to a visible community of men. A Sacrament, however, is not merely a sign of grace. The special characteristic of the Sacraments is that they are not merely the signs, but they are the instruments, of grace, and this not accidentally, but by the direct institution of Christ.

In the Church of God a vast number of outward signs are used which are not Sacraments. There are pictures and images, prescribed forms of prayer, and ceremonial of all sorts. You see the candles lighted round the altar, and the smoke of incense ascending before it, and all the beautiful things used in the service of God. These outward signs are intended for many purposes: some are symbolical, to teach the people the meaning of what is going on; some are devotional, to assist us in raising our hearts to God; and some are intended to give grace to those who use them properly. These are sometimes

called *sacramentals*, because, in a certain way, they resemble the Sacraments; but they give grace in quite a different manner.

The things that are blessed by the prayers of the Church—such as the holy water, the blessed candles, the ashes, the palm branches—are all intended to be means of grace to those who will use them—partly because they help us to raise up our minds to God, and partly through the efficacy of the prayers with which they were blessed; but to these things no promise of grace is attached. The Sacraments, however, give grace because they have been instituted by our Lord for this purpose, and therefore must give grace to those who receive them worthily.

The Sacraments are the instruments of the Precious Blood—that is, they are the channels by which our Lord pours into the souls of men the stores of grace and merit which He has purchased for us by His Precious Blood. “Of His fulness we all have received” (St. John i. 16); and every grace we receive, and every merit we may acquire, comes from that treasury of grace which He has laid up for us by His most blessed Passion. It does not matter in what shape grace comes to us—whether it is by our own prayer or by the intercession of the saints, or by the outward ordinances appointed for that special purpose. In all cases the grace we receive comes from the merits and Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ.

This being so, it is an essential condition of the Sacraments that they should be “ordained by Christ.” He alone has a right to appoint the channels by which His merits shall be conveyed. He alone can convert into instruments of grace the inanimate creatures which are used, and the words and actions of men which make up the external part of the Sacraments. Other rites and ceremonies the Church can ordain—all that is intended to instruct and edify her children the Church can appoint at her pleasure. It is her office to do so; but those sacramental rites which are to convey Divine Grace to mankind must all be directly instituted by our

Lord Himself. We cannot, indeed, in all cases tell exactly when it was that He instituted them, or the precise words in which He made His will known; but, most certainly, every Sacrament was instituted by our Lord Himself, and was appointed by Him for the sanctification of His Church.

If we think of this, my dear brethren, it explains all difficulties. Why should these insignificant external acts produce such wonderful consequences? Why should these few drops of water, or this anointing with oil, carry with them such priceless spiritual treasures? Why? Because in them our Lord is working—the hands of the external minister of the Sacrament are seen; but it is the internal Minister, the true High Priest, who does the work: “My Father worketh until now, and I work.” St. Augustine says: “He it is who baptizes in the Holy Ghost: let Peter baptize, He it is who baptizes: let Paul baptize, He it is who baptizes: let Judas baptize, He it is who baptizes,” and so of all the other Sacraments. It is our Lord who works in them, and by them applies His remedies to our souls. We cannot wonder that, in His hands, even the most contemptible things of this earth should become powerful instruments.

If, my dear brethren, we could always realize this, and bear it in mind, what a love and reverence we should have for the Sacraments! If, for instance, when you went to Confession you could bring yourself to think, not of the commonplace surroundings—the confessional, the familiar forms of words—if, instead of these, you could see our Lord waiting to receive you, and could hear such words as those which He used when, “stretching forth His hand, He touched the leper, saying: I will; be thou made clean” (St. Matt. viii. 3)—if you could realize our Lord’s presence in this way, how different would be your feeling! Again, if you always remembered that the graces you receive in the Sacraments were nothing else but the fruits of our Lord’s Passion, and the price of His Precious Blood, you would value them much more than you now do. You



could not be indifferent or careless if you felt that your soul was to be sprinkled, as it were, with the sacred drops "of the Precious Blood of Christ, as of a lamb unspotted and undefiled" (1 St. Peter i. 18).

The Catechism tells us that "the Sacraments always give grace to those who receive them worthily;" and this brings me to speak of the *way* in which the Sacraments act upon our souls, and the conditions necessary for receiving them worthily. The marked distinction between prayer and the Sacraments shows itself in the way in which they produce their effects, as well as in other things. When we pray, the grace of God is given in answer to our own exertion, and is generally proportioned to it. Our Lord says: "Ask, and it shall be given to you: seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be open to you: for every one that asketh receiveth, and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened" (St. Matt. vii. 7); and again St. James says: "You ask and you receive not, because you ask amiss" (St. James iv. 3). If we ask well and diligently, we receive abundantly; but if we ask amiss, we receive according to our petition. "He who soweth sparingly shall also reap sparingly: and he who soweth in blessings shall also reap of blessings" (2 Cor. ix. 6.)

In the Sacraments, however, God does not deal with us in the same manner. They are the fountains of the Lord—the "open fountain for the house of Israel;" and we are to "draw water in joy" from them. We must come with such dispositions as to be capable of receiving the waters of life. Like the woman mentioned in the Holy Scripture (4 Kings iv. 5), we must bring vessels to receive the sacred oil of God's grace, which is miraculously poured out; but it is not our labour which provides it, but God's fountain which pours it out. In the Sacraments it would seem as if our Lord said to us, as God said to the children of Israel: "The Lord will fight for you, and you shall hold your peace" (Ex. xiv. 14).

This does not mean that we need not take trouble to

prepare ourselves for the Sacraments. On the contrary, the more perfect our preparation, the greater the grace we shall receive, since our Lord "fills the hungry with good things." The greater capacity we bring, the greater will be the abundance with which we shall be filled.

The Sacraments, then, my dear brethren, are in all respects a complete contrast to prayer in the way in which they bestow grace. Prayer is an inward act, whilst the Sacraments are external signs for giving grace; prayer is for all mankind, without exception, but the Sacraments are the special privilege and treasure of Christ's Church. In prayer men must toil—they must ask, and seek, and knock, and the Lord will grant grace according to their exertions; but in the Sacraments it is Christ who works, and we have only to receive. In the one we draw water painfully, "for the well is deep;" in the other our Lord Himself gives the water which shall become a "fountain of water springing up into life everlasting" (St. John iv. 14).

These two great instruments of Divine Grace must, as I said before, be used together; as one is not meant, in any degree, to take the place of the other, but each is intended to be the completion and perfection of the other.

The Israelites, as they went out of Egypt, had to march through the desert to the promised land, and on their way we are told how they came upon fountains of water, and green palm growing beside them, and they "encamped by the waters" (Ex. xv. 27). We may well compare the Church of Christ struggling on in this world—in "a land without way and without water"—to this painful march through the desert, where almost every step was a battle, and every man was in danger of fainting by the way; the Sacraments are the fountains provided by the roadside—they are the fountains of strength, the fountains of consolation, by which the Catholic Church and her children are enabled to withstand the labour and the heat of the day.

Again, we may liken the life of each individual

Christian to the march through the desert to the promised land, and think how graciously our Lord has instituted the Sacraments as refreshing springs at all the painful and difficult places on the way, at all the turnings of road, as we may consider them. As soon as the Christian is born, the Sacrament of Baptism receives him, marks him as the child of God, clothes him with the garment of grace, and sets him forth on his way; when childhood is past, and the time for fighting arrives, and the enemy is about to come against him in force, the Holy Spirit descends upon him in the Sacrament of Confirmation, to make him the good soldier of Christ, and arm him against the time of need; when he comes to the great turning-point of life, and enters the married state, or else dedicates himself to the ministry of the Lord, the Sacraments of Matrimony and Holy Orders are ready to equip him for the new career he is undertaking; and when, at last, the pilgrim, worn out and wearied, can no longer fight for himself, but "his enemies have encompassed him round, and beaten him flat to the ground," then, in his trouble, his Lord comes to meet him with the Sacrament of Extreme Unction, to supply him with all the graces he will need at the last moment of his trial.

But, besides all these, there are two which are not for any passing emergency, and cannot be compared to springs in the desert. They are needed throughout the Christian's whole career, and can only be likened to the manna which God rained down upon His people every day, or the water from the rock; "and they drank of the same spiritual drink, and they drank of the spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was Christ" (1 Cor. x. 4).

The Sacraments of the Holy Eucharist and Penance are the daily manna and the fountain of purification, without which no one can safely pass through the desert of this life.

# Catholic Sermons

BY REV. J. B. BAGSHAW.

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## SERMON XXXVI.

### *Visible Signs.*

“That man that is called Jesus made clay and anointed my eyes, and said to me: Go to the pool of Siloe and wash. And I went, I washed, and I see” (St. John ix. 11).

WE read in this history how our Lord was pleased to make use of an elaborate outward ceremonial in order to give sight to the blind man. He made clay, and spread it on his eyes, and then sent him to wash in the pool of Siloe. He could, of course, have cured him without this. Our Lord might have worked the cure of the blind man by a word, as when “He commanded the winds and the sea, and there came a great calm” (St. Matt. viii. 26); or He might have done it without a word, as when “virtue went out from Him” and healed the poor woman who had merely touched the hem of His garment.

This miracle, my dear brethren, and a great many others which we read of in the Holy Scripture, illustrate the sacramental system—that is, that it is the will of God to connect great interior, or supernatural, effects with the use of very simple things. It is hardly necessary to give instances of this, for the Old Testament is full of them—as, for instance, when the prophet Eliseus “struck the waters with the mantle of Elias that had fallen from him,” “and they were divided hither and thither” (4 Kings ii. 18); or, again, when he sent Naaman the Syrian to “wash seven times in the Jordan” (4 Kings v. 10), and so to be healed of his leprosy.

These outward actions were things of no value of themselves, and yet God chose to make them the instruments of His power. It may be that this use of



exterior signs is suitable, because man himself is such a mixture of the visible and the invisible, of the tangible and intangible, of body and spirit; but, at any rate, it is clear that it *is* God's will to use external symbols in this way.

In the Old Law Almighty God appointed a vast number of rites to be observed, and attached to them the greatest possible importance, and by them conferred many of His favours. "Keep, therefore, the precepts and ceremonies and judgments which I command thee this day to do. If, after thou hast heard these judgments, thou keep and do them, the Lord thy God will also keep His covenant to thee, and the mercy which He swore to thy fathers" (Deut. vii. 11). Here we have the "precepts, *ceremonies*, and judgments" made the condition of the promised mercy. In the New Law our Lord has done the same thing, in a different way, by establishing His Sacraments as external signs of grace. In the Old Law the symbols enjoined were striking and majestic—to fill with awe the minds of men; but in the covenant of grace the outwards rites are more humble, more secret, more gracious, but, at the same time, infinitely more fruitful and life-giving.

For the external part of the Sacraments three things are required, which are—matter, form, and minister. The matter of a Sacrament is some external thing, or some rite or action, which is perceptible to the senses, so as, in some way or other, to represent the grace which is inwardly conferred. Thus, the pouring of the water is the matter of Baptism; the imposition of hands and unction are the matter of Confirmation, and so forth. These actions represent the *sort* of grace which is conferred upon the soul by their instrumentality. Besides matter there must be *form*—that is, some words must be used with the matter, to give it a definite significance or shape. The mere pouring of the water would have no definite meaning by itself; but, when it is joined to the words—"I baptize thee in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost"—

it has the outward sign of the inward grace which Baptism confers on the soul.

In addition to matter and form, you must have a minister—that is to say, some person who has the power to apply the matter and form—or, rather, the outward actions cannot really exist, as the matter of Sacraments, unless there is some one who has power to do them. Each Sacrament has its proper minister. In Baptism any one can be the minister in case of necessity. In some Sacraments a priest is required, and others can be conferred only by a bishop. There are, moreover, two sorts of power belonging to the ministers of the Church, which are the power of order and jurisdiction. The power of order is that power bestowed by the sacrament of Holy Order—which no earthly power can take away—and jurisdiction is the power granted to the legitimate pastors of the Church to exercise authority in her name. In some of the Sacraments the power of *order* is necessary and sufficient—that is, every priest validly ordained must have the power of administering them; but in others the power of *jurisdiction* is also required—so a priest cannot administer them unless he has jurisdiction, or authority, as well as valid orders. You often read, for instance, of the duty of going to Confession to a priest “approved by the bishop.” This means that a priest cannot validly administer the sacrament of Penance, unless he is “approved” by the bishop of the diocese, and has received jurisdiction; or, as we commonly say, has “faculties for hearing confessions.”

The outward parts of the Sacraments—the matter, form and minister—vary with each Sacrament. In some, the matter and form have very little resemblance or analogy with the matter and form of the other Sacraments; and, indeed, it is not always easy to say, with certainty, what constitutes the matter and what the form. We class the Sacraments together as the means of grace, as if they were all alike, but, in reality, each one is distinct and like nothing else, and the resemblances which we trace between them are very far from being complete.

There is a great deal to be said about the dispositions necessary for receiving the Sacraments. They are our "Saviour's fountains," and the "living waters" poured into our souls are abundant in proportion to the capacity we have for receiving them. Those who approach the Sacraments with a great purity and preparation of heart—with "hunger and thirst after justice"—will receive abundantly; whilst the careless, the idle, and those whose hearts are full of the world, will receive but very little. Oh, my dear brethren, these Sacraments are a great responsibility for us all! What abundant graces and help we might receive every day if we were only ready to accept them! And yet, in the midst of all this abundance, we remain dry! Are not a great many Christians like Gideon's fleece, which remained dry whilst everything around was drenched with dew?

The disposition necessary for receiving a Sacrament is that there should not be any hindrance in the way of the gift it is intended to bestow, and, therefore, as the effects of the Sacraments are various, it is necessary to describe them in detail.

Of the seven Sacraments, there are three which can never be repeated under any circumstances. If it is certain that they have once been validly received—whether well or ill, lawfully or unlawfully—they cannot be received again. If there is a doubt whether they have been properly administered, it is quite lawful to give them again *conditionally*—that is, with the condition that they are only to take effect *in case* the Sacrament has never been really received; but, unless there is some such doubt, it would be a sacrilege to repeat them.

The Sacraments which can never, under any circumstances, be repeated, are Baptism, Confirmation, and Holy Order. Each of these three Sacraments makes you something which you were not before, and gives you something that you cannot lose, or, as it is said, impresses a mark or character upon your soul.

Let us for a moment consider, my dear brethren, what is meant by these words, "a mark or character." You

have all received at least some of these divine marks, and it would be well for you if you realized more fully what their meaning and effect are. A mark on your soul means that God has raised you to a new rank, a dignity you had not before—that He has given you a new position, and a new place in His creation, in which to stand before Him for ever. If you have once received such a dignity, you can never again be as if you had not received it; it marks you out for ever in the sight of God and His holy angels, and is of itself an invaluable gain, which can never be lost. It cannot be lost, indeed, but it may be turned into misfortune. You may apostatize from your calling, and disgrace your rank, and so turn a blessing into a curse, but you can never be as if you had not received it.

The Sacrament of Baptism gives you the stamp and rank of a Christian, and with it the right of a specially adopted son. “And because you are sons, God hath sent the spirit of His son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father” (Gal. iv. 6). When once you have been thus made the sons of God, you can never lose this rank and undo this adoption; you may be unworthy, and stain your baptismal robe; you may, like the prodigal son in the parable, leave your Father’s house, and squander the riches He has bestowed on you, living riotously, but you can never cease to be a son. This rank and relationship with the Living God must either be a glory in heaven, or an exceeding ignominy in hell. Which is it to be for us?

Confirmation, again, is another step. A distinct rank in the Christian army has been bestowed upon you. You are no longer merely Christians; you are the soldiers of Christ and the chosen temples of the Holy Ghost. A fresh jewel has been given you for your eternal crown, one step higher and nearer to the throne of God, to which you would never have been entitled if you had not been confirmed. It is for this reason that the Church desires to confirm even little children in danger of death, that they may not be deprived of the dignity bestowed by the Sacrament, even if they do not need its special helps.



But here, again, is a danger : if you are unfaithful to this call, and degrade this dignity, you do not lose it, but you turn it to your own condemnation. " Know you not that you are the temple of God, and that the spirit of God dwelleth in you ? But if any man violate the temple of God, him shall God destroy " (1 Cor. iii. 16).

The same applies, with still greater force, to the dignity of the priesthood conferred by the Sacrament of Holy Order. The Sacrament impresses upon each one who receives it an indelible mark, and to each one may be applied the words of the Psalmist : " The Lord hath sworn and He will not repent. Thou art a priest forever according to the order of Melchisedeck " (Ps. cix. 4); and, as a priest, each one of us will have to be judged.

To receive any one of these three Sacraments validly, the only mental disposition is consent ; you must at least be willing to accept the proffered dignity. When it is a question of accepting a favour, those who do not refuse are considered to accept, and if there are any not in a condition to accept, those who act for them *assume* that they accept. In this way, as little children cannot themselves consent to the dignity bestowed upon them in Baptism, the Church accepts it on their behalf, and they are validly baptized in their unconscious infancy.

But " character " is not the only effect of the Sacraments ; they are also generally meant to give certain distinct spiritual assistance, and also the *capacity* for obtaining this assistance. By this I mean that they are intended not so much to give a passing spiritual help for an emergency, as to give a power to be used, or a store to be drawn upon, to which we can return again and again, or we may, perhaps, say a capital to be traded with. St. Paul says to St. Timothy : " I admonish thee that thou stir up the grace of God which is in thee by the imposition of my hands " (2 Tim i. 6). What does this mean but that the grace bestowed is like a habit which can lie dormant and useless within us, or, on the other hand, can be stirred up into vigorous action ?

Those who receive the Sacraments to which such special help is attached must of necessity receive the right to obtain this help, even if they receive them in such a manner as to be incapable of any *present* benefit from them. For instance, the Sacraments of Holy Order and Matrimony are intended to give those who receive them the necessary graces for performing the duties of the states of life upon which they are entering. However carelessly or badly people may receive these Sacraments, they will always have the capacity for obtaining the necessary graces of their state, if only they will put themselves into a condition to make use of them. The effects of these Sacraments *revive* for all those who are in a state of grace, so as to become a permanent source of strength to those who will properly employ them. It is obvious, however, that those who receive these Sacraments carelessly lose many special graces which they can never recover.

Besides the sacramental graces of this sort which are given, the Sacraments have all another object, which is either to give or to increase sanctifying grace in our souls. This is the grace which makes us the friends of God, and everything else is subservient to it. All holiness simply consists in having an abundant store of sanctifying grace, and everything in religion is meant to assist us in obtaining, preserving, and increasing it; and, therefore, the Sacraments, as the great means of sanctification, are specially intended to be channels of sanctifying grace.

They are sometimes divided into Sacraments of the living and Sacraments of the dead—a distinction which has reference to their office of bestowing habitual grace. Baptism and Penance are called Sacraments of the dead, but as if *any* Sacrament could be received after death, not because they are intended to *give* sanctifying grace to those who are deprived of it. The grace of God is the supernatural life of the soul, and the Sacraments of the dead are those Sacraments which are meant for sinners who are deprived of this supernatural life, to enable them to recover it.

The other Sacraments are called Sacraments of the living, because they are not intended to give the first grace, but to preserve and increase the store of grace in the souls of those who are already living the life of grace. To receive any one of the Sacraments of the living worthily, therefore, it is necessary to be free from mortal sin—that is to say, to be living in the grace of God ; whereas Baptism and Penance only require a *readiness* and proper preparation to receive this grace.

Anyone, therefore, receiving Confirmation, or Holy Eucharist, or Order, or Matrimony, or Extreme Unction in a state of mortal sin is guilty of a sacrilege, by profaning one of the fountains of Divine grace. When it is a question of the Holy Eucharist, people generally understand this well enough ; everyone knows that it is a mortal sin to make an unworthy Communion ; but people do not always think enough about it when they receive some of the other Sacraments—when they are married, for instance. It is necessary, however, to be in a state of grace in order to receive any one of the Sacraments of the living, and it is the duty, therefore, of all who receive them to examine carefully into the state of their own consciences, and, if necessary, to prepare for them by a good confession. To receive the two “ Sacraments of the dead ” it is not, of course, necessary to be in a state of grace, but you must be in dispositions to *receive* grace, otherwise you would commit a sacrilege by receiving the Sacrament in vain. Those who are to be baptized when grown up, and all who receive the Sacrament of Penance, are bound to have that sorrow for sin without which pardon cannot be granted. Those who have not a sincere sorrow for the sins they have committed, and a real intention not to commit sin for the future, are incapable of receiving pardon ; and, therefore, no Sacrament can ever forgive them their sins. But of this I shall have to speak later on.

These, then, are the conditions for receiving any sort of grace in the Sacraments ; you must be free from mortal sin, or in a condition to receive the pardon of mortal sin, as the case may be, since unrepented mortal

sin absolutely prevents the Sacraments from producing their sanctifying effect in the soul. If you are not in these dispositions, you not only fail to receive any grace, but you offer a great insult to Almighty God, by making His Sacraments void.

To receive the Sacraments *profitably*, however—that is, to obtain from them all the grace and blessing they were designed to bestow—requires a great deal more than merely being free from mortal sin. It is one of the great failings and misfortunes of ordinary Christians, my dear brethren, that they receive the Sacraments in such a way as to derive from them only a part, and sometimes a very small part, of the treasures of grace they were meant to give. The Sacraments are abundant and unfailing fountains, but our capacity for grace is sometimes very small, so that the want of good dispositions hinders a large part of the intended effects of the Sacraments.

It is important for us to consider this, because it is a very serious evil to hinder God's grace within us, and to "make void," to a great extent, the instruments of our sanctification.

If we are in such disposition that the Sacraments can do very little for us, and, therefore, the treasures of Christ's Precious Blood are, to a great degree, wasted upon us, it is a misfortune, even if we do not actually receive them unworthily. If our souls are such hard and stony ground that a great part of the good seed of God's grace is wasted, and, instead of producing fruit a hundred-fold, scarcely brings forth any fruit at all, we may be sure that God will make us responsible for our want of good dispositions.

The greatest of all dispositions is that of desire. Our Lord says: "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after justice, for they shall have their fill" (St. Matt. v. 6); but *do* we hunger and thirst after grace when we approach the Sacraments? If not, we cannot expect to be filled. This is the secret of the little good which many people derive from their confessions and communions. They have no great desire, and therefore



they get but little. "Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it" (Ps. lxxx.11). These were words of God to the Jews, and they are addressed to us also when we receive the Sacraments. Have a great and earnest and burning desire to obtain all the graces designed for you, and to frustrate no part of them, and then you will have no reason to complain that you receive little grace. "He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He hath sent empty away" (St. Luke i. 53).

If, instead of this great desire, you are indifferent, and have no real wish for an increase of grace, but, perhaps, think, in your heart, that you do very well as you are, and are not inclined to be much better, then it is not likely that the graces you receive will do much more than just keep you as you are. Our Lord, in the Apocalypse, addresses this reproach to the angel of the Church of Laodicia: "Thou sayest, I am rich and made wealthy, and have need of nothing; and thou knowest not that thou art wretched and miserable, and poor and blind and naked" (Ap. iii. 17). People do not exactly say, "I am rich and have need of nothing," when they approach the Sacraments, but very often they do not know *how* wretched and miserable they are, and, therefore, are very far from having the great desire for God's grace which they ought to have.

The grace of God, moreover, is given for a purpose—to enable men to advance in perfection. It is given for *progress*, and if people have not any idea of making progress, but, in reality, mean to stay just as they are, they are not in a good condition to receive grace.

This happens either because they are inert and slothful about religious things, or else because they harbour some love, or mean to go on in some way of life which is inconsistent with perfection. In the Old Testament we read very often of some of the Kings of Juda—how they served God, and did their duty very well in the main; but it is added, "Nevertheless, he took not away the high places" (3 Kings xxii. 44). So it is with a great many Christians—they are good up to a certain point; but, yet they will not take away the high places"

—they allow something to remain in their life and conduct which is a perpetual hindrance to the operation of God's grace. It is just this want of readiness to co-operate loyally with the graces the Sacraments are intended to confer which causes them to produce such limited effects in our souls.

There is one thing more to be mentioned concerning the Sacraments, and that is the ceremonies employed in their administration. Whenever the Sacraments are solemnly administered, in addition to the essential "matter" and "form" appointed by our Lord, there is a certain ceremonial established by the Church. For example, in the Holy Eucharist, in Baptism, Confirmation, and most of the Sacraments, an elaborate ritual is used, to which the Catholic Church attaches great importance. The Council of Trent declares that, "if any one says that the received and approved rites of the Catholic Church, used in the solemn administration of the Sacraments, can, without sin, be despised or omitted by the ministers, or that they can be changed for others by the pastors of different churches, let him be anathema."

These ceremonies are appointed for many purposes. They are a kind of safeguard for the essential rites on which the efficacy of the Sacraments depends. When the exact words and actions which the priest has to use throughout are carefully regulated, there is little danger of any change being heedlessly made in what is essential.

The ceremonial consists of two parts. The Church ordains that prayers should be said to ask of God for the special graces the Sacraments are designed to convey, since prayer ought to be united with the Sacraments; and there is a special efficacy in those particular forms of prayer which are consecrated by the authority of the Church. No prayers that men can say in private can have the same weight as those solemn forms in which are, as it were, the voice of the Catholic Church. In addition to prayer, the Church appoints certain ceremonies to be used to express, in an external,

visible way the effects which the Sacraments are intended to bestow. For instance, we shall see how beautifully the "white garment" and "burning light" explain the effects produced in Baptism.

St. Paul says: If the ministration of death engraven with letters upon stones was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not steadfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance which is made void, how shall not the ministration of the Spirit be rather in glory?" (2 Cor. iii. 7.) If the ordinances of the Old Law, which was to pass away, were so beautiful and solemn, the rites of the New Law—which are intended to bestow on men the graces purchased by the Precious Blood of Christ—ought certainly to be surrounded by every ceremonial which can inspire our hearts with reverence for them.

The external things which the Church has appointed to be done in the ministration of the Sacraments are all intended to make us love and reverence the fountains of Divine grace, and make us daily more grateful to that loving Saviour who has appointed them for our help and refreshment on our journey through this life to the promised land.

Think, my dear brethren, of all the Sacraments as the channels of the Precious Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, and see Him working in them, and you cannot fail to love and reverence them as you ought. If we were only as much accustomed, as we ought to be, to dwell, in spirit, at the foot of the cross, and were full of a tender devotion to the Passion of our Blessed Lord, we could never neglect His Sacraments. "They shall look upon Him they have pierced." Let us look tenderly and lovingly at the Sacred Wounds of Jesus, and think of all that He suffered for us upon the cross, and that His Precious Blood is the price of our redemption, and then we shall not fail to make good use of all the means that He has appointed to convey to us the merits of His Passion and death.

# Catholic Sermons

BY REV. J. B. BAGSHAWE.

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## SERMON XXXVII.

### *Baptism.*

“But you are a chosen generation, a kingly priesthood, a holy nation, a purchased people; that you may declare His virtues who hath called you out of darkness into His marvellous light” (1 St. Peter ii. 9).

OF all the favours that God has bestowed upon us, my brethren, there is none so great as that of the special adoption and vocation by which He has called us “out of darkness into His marvellous light.” The special instrument of this adoption is the Sacrament of Baptism, which “makes us Christians, children of God, and members of the Church.” We are going to-day to dwell on the effects of this Sacrament, because of its own incalculable importance, and that we may never undervalue the gifts God has bestowed upon us in it, or forget the responsibilities we have undertaken by receiving it.

Baptism is the gate of the Catholic Church—and by it we receive a right to all the privileges given by Christ to His Church: we become members of that “Church of God which He hath purchased with His own blood” (Act xx. 28); and, as members, we are made capable of receiving the Sacraments which our Lord has instituted for His Church. By Baptism we become “His people and the sheep of His pasture,” and the right to be members of that one fold which our Lord has established on earth, and to “go in and go out and find pasture” (St. John x. 9).

The special gift of Baptism is the adoption of sons which is bestowed on us; and with this adoption a number of other great privileges are bestowed. “For you have not received the spirit of bondage again in fear, but you have received the spirit of adoption of sons: whereby we cry Abba—Father” (Rom. viii. 15). The consequence of this adoption of sons is that we



put on a new character, and become, as it were, a new man—"who, according to God, is created in justice and holiness of truth" (Eph. iv. 24). With this new character of sons, we become heirs of the kingdom of God, by a title which no man can take from us:—"and if sons, heirs also; heirs indeed of God, and joint heirs with Christ" (Rom. viii. 7). Everyone, therefore, who has been baptised has a claim to be, for all eternity, the son of God, and has been made the heir of His kingdom—and has even now a right to reckon himself fellow-servant and fellow-member with all the angels who surround the throne of God.

"Now, therefore, you are no more strangers and foreigners; but you are fellow-citizens with the saints and domestics of God" (Eph. ii. 20). "Our feet were standing in thy courts, O Jerusalem" (Ps. cxxi.) Our feet are now but in the vestibule—the outer court of that heavenly Jerusalem of which we are the chosen members by our Baptism.

It is impossible to say too much, or to think too highly, of the immense dignity and inheritance bestowed by Baptism, which was once given to us, and is now daily given, by the free bounty of God, to every little child that is baptized.

The adoption of sons is accompanied by, or rather brought about by, the infusion of sanctifying grace. By this grace is washed away the guilt and stain of original sin, in which we were born, and, with it, every stain of actual sin which may have been incurred. It is the misfortune of the human race to be born in original sin, and, as the Catechism tells us, "all mankind have contracted the guilt and stain of original sin, except the Blessed Virgin, who, through the merits of her Divine Son, was conceived without the least guilt or stain of original sin." All others are born in "that guilt and stain which we inherit from Adam, who was the origin and head of all mankind;" the sin of Adam, our first father, descended upon us, so that we are born deprived of our birthright of original justice; and not only deprived of our birthright, but weighed down by a great

burden of weakness and misery. We are born liable to temptation and prone to evil: "the imagination and thought of man's heart are prone to evil from his youth" (Gen. x. 21). It is the object of the Sacrament of Baptism to remedy this misfortune, and to replace us in the holiness lost by original sin. By Baptism our birthright is restored to us in a supernatural way, when we are "born again of water and the Holy Ghost;" and in Baptism our Lord puts on us the "first robe"—that most perfect and spotless garment which comes fresh from the Precious Blood of Christ.

From the consideration of these great privileges, given in Baptism, we learn how precious it is, and that we cannot do without it. It is the one Sacrament of absolute necessity. The other Sacraments are necessary in certain cases, and to provide for certain wants; but Baptism is necessary as the means of entering into the kingdom of God, and becoming a partaker with Christ. Of this Sacrament is true, in the strictest sense, what our Lord said to St. Peter: "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me" (St. John xiii. 8). "Know you not that all we who are baptized in Christ Jesus are baptized in His death" (Rom. vi. 3). It is the special way in which Almighty God wills that men should become partakers in our Lord's Passion and merits. "He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved; but he that believeth not, shall be condemned" (St. Mark xvi. 16). "Unless a man be born again of water and the Holy Ghost, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (St. John iii. 5).

From the absolute necessity of Baptism two things must naturally be concluded. The first is a matter which hardly need be mentioned to Catholics—the duty of having their children baptized without the least unnecessary delay. When God is ready to bestow such a priceless boon upon their children, it is clear that parents cannot run even the smallest risk of frustrating the designs of His bounty by their own carelessness, and, therefore, good Catholics are never satisfied till the children have been baptized. The other thing to be con-

sidered is about *doubtful* Baptism—that is, when you cannot say for *certain* that Baptism has been validly administered. Whenever there is any real ground for doubting whether a person has been properly baptized, he is bound to be *conditionally* baptized. It is no use to say that there is a great probability that the Baptism was valid, that it might appear to be a reproach to those who professed to administer the Sacrament: all that is as nothing when compared with the absolute necessity of receiving, without any doubt, the Sacrament which makes you the child of God and the heir of the kingdom of heaven.

It is on this principle that the Catholic Church acts when Protestants are converted to the faith. They are, generally speaking, baptized on condition, not from any distrust of the validity of the Sacrament when conferred by those out of the Church, but simply because there appears to be sufficient reason for believing that some of them, at any rate, have either never been baptized at all, or else that the matter and form has been applied in such a manner as to make the validity of the Sacrament at least doubtful. As a general rule it is quite impossible to be certain in any particular case, and therefore, in England, the Church has commanded that “all converts from Protestantism shall be conditionally baptized, unless it be made most clearly evident that, in their Baptism, all things respecting the application of the matter and form have been duly performed.”—*First Provincial Synod*.

Although the Sacrament of Baptism is so universally necessary, yet there are two ways in which its place may be, in some measure, supplied to those who have not the opportunity of being baptized. The first is the Baptism of blood. It happened not unfrequently in the pagan persecutions that men were converted to Christ, and shed their blood for Him, without ever having been able to receive Baptism. In their case the exceeding charity which induced them to lay down their lives supplied the place of the Sacrament, and their martyrdom washed away all stain of sin, and opened for them

the kingdom of heaven. Thus, when St. Alban, the first English martyr, was led to death, the executioner was converted, and, throwing away his naked sword, he fell at the martyr's feet, and begged to die with him, or in his place. He had his wish, and was beheaded with St. Alban, and so was baptized in his own blood.

Again, the place of the Sacrament may be supplied by desire. The Council of Trent declares that no one can be saved "without the laver of Baptism or the desire of it"—by which it is meant, that those who turn to God with love, and sorrow for sin, and the desire of Baptism, may be saved, even if they cannot, in fact, receive the Sacrament. It may easily happen, and no doubt often does happen, that people are deprived of the Sacrament of Baptism, although they sincerely love God, and desire to do His will, and would certainly receive this Sacrament if only they had the opportunity. In such cases the want of Sacramental Baptism is supplied by the Baptism of desire. The Baptism of blood and the Baptism of desire are not sacraments, and do not give the mark or character which Baptism imprints, but they are extraordinary means by which a similar favour is bestowed upon those who cannot receive the Sacrament.

It is not, however, our concern to consider what are God's dealings with those who have no opportunity of receiving the Sacraments. St. Paul says: "What have I to do to judge them that are without?" (1 Cor. x. 12). What we have to do is to be very exact in availing ourselves of the means of grace God has given to us.

Let us now speak of Baptism a little more in detail. To begin with, there is but one Baptism, "one body and one spirit, as you are called in one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one Baptism" (Eph. iv. 4). Every one who is baptized at all, receives the same Baptism, and is made thereby a member of the same Church of Christ. It does not matter by whom the Sacrament may have been administered. The visible minister is only an instrument acting for our Lord, who "baptizes with the Holy Ghost" (St. Mark i. 8). To use the words of St. Augustine, which I before quoted, "Let



Peter baptize, He it is who baptizes : let Paul baptize, He it is who baptizes : let Judas baptize, He it is who baptizes." When you hear people speaking of the "Church of their Baptism," it is plain that they are forgetting the very essence of Baptism, which is to be the door into the one true Church of Christ—so that the Church of their Baptism cannot *possibly* be anything but the true Church of Christ. Every little child who is baptized, no matter by whom, is a member of the Catholic Church, and remains a member of it till he separates himself from the communion of that Church.

The matter and form of the Sacrament are described in the answer of the Catechism, which says : "Baptism is given by pouring water on the head of the child, saying at the same time these words, 'I baptize thee in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost ;'" any ordinary water will do, and any one may be the minister of the Sacrament in case of necessity. A case of necessity means, of course, when there is danger that a child may die unbaptized. In such a case, when a priest cannot be had, or cannot be had soon enough, every Christian is bound to act as minister—and everyone ought, therefore, to understand exactly what has to be done.

Except in necessity, however, no one but a priest may baptize, so a child ought to be taken as soon as possible to the church ; or, if it is too ill to be taken so far, the priest should be sent for to baptize it. The Baptism given in the church is *solemn* Baptism—that is, Baptism accompanied by all the ceremonies commanded by the Church ; at home these ceremonies are left out, and the Baptism is *private*. But the ceremonies should be supplied as soon as the child can be taken to the church, because they are a solemn form by which the child is dedicated to God, and special blessings asked for it by the solemn prayers of the Church.

Most people have seen the ceremonies of Baptism often enough, but perhaps without giving much consideration to their meaning. When you go to the church to be present at the christening of a little

infant, you do not always think enough of the deep meaning of those external actions by which the Sacrament is surrounded ;—that they are symbols of the mighty effects which God's grace is working by means of those few drops of water.

Baptism is, as we have said, the gate of the Christian Church, and the ceremonial of each Baptism commences by a solemn introduction into the Church. Whilst the child is still at the church door the priest asks : “ What dost thou ask of the Church of God ? ” “ Faith.” “ And what doth faith bring thee to ? ” “ Life everlasting.” “ If thou wilt enter into life, keep the Commandments. Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with thy whole heart, with thy whole soul, and with thy whole mind : and thy neighbour as thyself.” After various other prayers the child to be baptized is led into the church, and brought to the font with the words : “ Come into the Temple of God, that thou mayest have part with Christ unto life everlasting,” whilst the Apostles' Creed is recited by the sponsors. The Baptismal font itself, placed near the door of the church, recalls to you that, by Baptism, you enter into the great society of the Church of God ; the water it contains, which is to be the channel of such wonderful graces, is solemnly blessed on Holy Saturday, and consecrated with the holy oils.

The holy oils used in Baptism are the oil of catechumens and the holy chrism. These holy oils are consecrated every year on Maundy Thursday by the Bishop of the diocese, and the oil remaining over at the end of the year is consumed. By calling them *holy* oils, we mean that the prayers of the Church have been offered, with great solemnity, to beg of God to make these oils the instruments of special blessings in the Sacraments and consecrations in which they are used. The oil of catechumens is so called because, in the early Church, those who were preparing for Baptism—the catechumens—were anointed with it before they were baptized. The chrism is the oil with which the chalice, the altar-stone, and everything specially consecrated to God is anointed,

and the use of it in Baptism points out to us how solemnly we are dedicated to Almighty God.

The ceremonies used in Baptism are of various kinds : there are prayers and symbolical actions. Some of these prayers are "exorcisms"—that is, prayers that God will not allow the evil spirits to have power over the child that is chosen to be God's temple. We read in the Gospel how our Lord "threatened the unclean spirits" and commanded them to go forth : and when He sent out His apostles, He gave them power "to cast out devils" (St. Mark iii. 15), and this power was intrusted not to His apostles only, but to the seventy-two disciples whom He sent out in His name ; "they returned with joy, saying, " Lord, the devils also are subject to us in Thy name" (St. Luke x. 17).

It is this power which the Church uses when, in Baptism, she commands the devil to leave the servant of God whom "our Lord Jesus Christ has deigned to call to His holy grace and benediction, and to the font of Baptism, and never to dare to violate the sign of the cross" then solemnly signed upon its forehead. The Church also prays for the child, that God may "illuminate His servant with the light of His intelligence, and cleanse him and sanctify him, and give him true wisdom to be worthy of the grace of Baptism, and to hold fast a firm hope, right council, and holy doctrine, so as to be worthy to become the temple of God, and to deserve that the Holy Spirit should dwell in him."

Such is the tenor of the Church's prayers at Baptism, and they are accompanied by several very significant ceremonies : the child receives the blessed "salt of wisdom to become a propitiation unto life everlasting ;" the priest touches the ears, using our Lords' own words, " Ephpheta, which is, Be thou opened," and anoints the breast and the shoulders with the holy oil of catechumens. These ceremonies are intended to represent, and to carry out, the entire consecration to God which takes place at our Baptism : the consecration of the senses and of the heart : of the breast to be forward in battle, and of the shoulders to bear the cross of our Lord. This consecra-

tion is completed after the Baptism, by the second anointing with the holy chrism with which the new Christian is solemnly dedicated as the temple of God.

To denote the special "sanctifying grace" which is bestowed in Baptism, two most beautiful ceremonies are used. The priest, after the Baptism, lays upon the child a white robe with the words: "Receive this white garment, and see thou carry it without stain before the Judgment-seat of our Lord Jesus Christ"—and then he presents to the newly-baptized infant a lighted taper, saying: "Receive this burning light and keep thy Baptism so as to be without blame: keep the commandments of God, that when the Lord shall come to the nuptials, thou mayest meet Him in the company of all the saints in the heavenly court, and have eternal life, and live for ever and ever. Amen."

Nothing can express in a more striking way the effect of the sanctifying grace which has just been given—the grace which clothes the soul with a garment of spotless innocence, and lights up that burning fire of charity which our Lord came to kindle upon earth.

Besides these ceremonies, two solemn professions and promises are made: "Dost thou renounce Satan? and all his works? and all his pomps? I do." And again: "Dost thou believe in God the Father Almighty, and in Jesus Christ, His only Son our Lord? Dost thou believe in the Holy Ghost, the Holy Catholic Church? I do." These are our "Baptismal vows"—the solemn promises made for us when first we become the member of Christ's Church: to be true and faithful followers of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to renounce His enemies, and at the same time to hold fast till our death the holy faith in which we were baptized. By these promises we shall most certainly be judged, and it will be well for us if we recall them often to our minds, and distinctly renew them from time to time.

What, then, is it we have renounced? The devil, with all his works and pomps. We have promised to renounce Satan, as the enemy of God, and to pay him no allegiance; we have promised to renounce his works



—all these evil deeds which spring from “the concupiscence of the flesh, the concupiscence of the eyes, and the pride of life”(1 St. John ii. 16). We have promised also to renounce the “pomps” of the devil: that is, all those baits and snares by which he lures men on to destruction—“the cares, riches and pleasures of this life,” by which the good seed is choked, and made to produce no fruit.

I must here say a word about godfathers and godmothers, and the duties they undertake. The office of sponsor is a very important one, and one on which the Catholic Church lays a great stress. At a solemn Baptism there should always be godfather and godmother, but never *more* than one of each—and, indeed, only *one* sponsor is enough if there is any difficulty in getting both. The office of godfather and godmother is to answer for the children at the font, and to undertake, as far as they *reasonably can*, to watch over their religious education. It is obvious that no one but a Catholic can reasonably undertake the charge of seeing children educated in the Catholic faith, and therefore it is not lawful to have Protestant godfathers or godmothers. The sponsors only undertake to do what they *reasonably can*, for the children’s education—that is, what can be done without any unreasonable interference or difficulty, so that no one need be afraid of the responsibility. It gives to the sponsors an occasion for exercising their zeal and charity, should opportunity offer, but does not bind them to anything more.

It is necessary, however, to be careful in accepting the office of sponsor, for another reason: by doing so you contract a kind of “spiritual relationship” with the child, and also with the child’s parents. This spiritual relationship is in some respects like a blood relationship, and, therefore, it is, by the law of the Church, an impediment to marriage. A person who had stood godfather or godmother to a child could not afterwards marry the child, or the parents of the child, without a dispensation, and therefore it is necessary to see that

difference in the age and other circumstances are such as to put a marriage out of the question.

I have gone rather minutely into the ceremonies of Baptism, my dear brethren, because it is most desirable that we should take an interest in all the rites of the Catholic Church, and endeavour to see the full beauty and meaning of them all. These ceremonies bring before us the usages of the ancient Church, and, moreover, make us feel how near we are to that spiritual world which we cannot see, and yet is so closely connected with the material world around us. They remind us, also, of our own responsibilities, and recall to our thoughts what we ourselves have received and undertaken in Baptism.

I will, therefore, conclude my observations on the Sacrament of Baptism by a few words on the special duties of that Christian character which was conferred upon us by our Lord at the baptismal font. "Keep thy Baptism so as to be without blame." That was the charge given to us, my brethren. How have we attended to it? At your Baptism our Lord chose you, and you chose Him. He said to you, as He once said to the Jews: "You shall be my people, and I will be your God." He gave Himself to you, and you accepted Him as your inheritance. "The Lord is the portion of my inheritance and of my chalice: it is Thou that will restore my inheritance to me" (Ps. xv. 4). How have you kept this solemn agreement? Have you been faithful, or have you gone over to those enemies you renounced? Have you been loyal, or disloyal? Do you glory in that Christian name which has been given to you? or are you sometimes ashamed of our Lord and His holy faith?

Again, Almighty God said to you at your Baptism: "Thou art my son, this day have I begotten thee" (Ps. ii. 7). What sort of sons have you been to Him? "For whom He foreknew, He also predestinated to be conformable to the image of His Son, that He might be the first born of many brethren" (Rom. viii. 29). Have we been "conformable to the image of His Son"? or have we, at least, *tried* to make our lives conformable to the standard He has given to us?

God not only made us His children, but He endowed us, as sons, with a rich treasure of grace, which He freely poured into our souls. What use have we made of all this grace? It is true of a great many that, like the prodigal son in the Gospel, almost the first use they make of their will is to waste the treasure given to them. "Father, give me the portion of substance that falleth to me: and not many days after, the younger son, gathering all together, went abroad into a far country, and there wasted his substance, living riotously" (St. Luke xv. 13). How has it been with us? Have we shown reasonable diligence in using the graces intrusted to us, or have we wasted them, living riotously?

"I have loved thee with an everlasting love, therefore have I drawn thee, taking pity on thee" (Jer. xxxi. 3). Almighty God has not only endowed us as His children, but has loved us as His children, "with an everlasting love," and we must ask ourselves, as we shall one day be asked, What return have we made so far, and what return are we now making, for that everlasting love of God of which Holy Baptism was the pledge?

"See thou carry it without stain before the Judgment-seat of our Lord Jesus Christ." Our one great duty in life is to keep unsullied that garment of innocence with which our Baptism invested us. "For as many of you as have been baptized in Christ have put on Christ" (Gal. iii. 27). The brightness of the garment in which we are clothed at Baptism is not our own; but our robes are washed and "made white in the Blood of the Lamb." They are glorious with the merits of Jesus, and shine with the brightness of His Precious Blood. What an ignominy and misery it will be for us if, one day, we have to stand before the judgment-seat of God, not with the bright robe of grace which was given us, but defiled and dishonoured and disgraced, bearing with us the mark and character of Christians only for our greater shame and condemnation.

# Catholic Sermons

BY REV. J. B. BAGSHAWE.

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## SERMON XXXVIII.

### *Confirmation.*

“Take unto you the armour of God, that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and to stand in all things perfect” (Eph. vi. 13).

I HAVE been speaking, my dear brethren, of the Sacrament of Baptism, which makes us the children of God, and now come to the Sacrament which gives to us the additional character of the soldiers of Christ—that is, the Sacrament of Confirmation. It is not enough for us, in this mortal life, to practise the virtues of children—we must add to these, something of the heroism of soldiers. Our Lord says: “The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent bear it away” (St. Matt. xi. 12). Those who have not the courage to be firm in standing up for the cause of God, and sometimes even, to be stern and violent, can hardly hope to save their souls. For this reason it is that our Lord has established on earth a Sacrament from which men may receive the supernatural gift of strength and fortitude to fight the battles of a Christian life.

“The life of man upon earth is a warfare” (Job vii. 1) the Holy Scripture tells us, and, from his cradle to his grave, he is exposed to the attacks of a terrible enemy. “Our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers, against the rulers of the world of this darkness, against the spirit of wickedness in the high places” (Eph. vi. 12). Our life is like the march of an army through an enemy’s country—there can never be peace, and there is not a moment’s security except in watchfulness. If the soldiers stand to their arms, and are on their guard, night and day, they may go on unharmed; but a moment’s false security may be their destruction. It is a battle, moreover, in



which we *must* be victorious. *Væ victis!* woe to the conquered! It is a miserable thing to be overcome in an earthly battle, and those who are defeated meet but little sympathy—but in this conflict the woe and misery are infinitely greater. Yes! my dear brethren, we *must* conquer, and therefore we must not fail to put on the “armour of God.”

A soldier cannot fight without his arms—and in this warfare our arms must be the armour of God. Nothing of our own—no natural qualities that we can bring, are of any avail to withstand such an enemy as we have to fight against; and no merely human armour is able to “extinguish all the fiery darts of the most wicked one.” Mere natural courage will not help us—and, indeed, we constantly find that some of those who are the bravest in temporal matters, are the weakest and most cowardly in spiritual things; and, on the other hand, that God has chosen the “weak things of the world, that He may confound the strong” (1 Cor. i. 27).

The Sacrament of Confirmation has been instituted by our Lord, to furnish us with all the arms needed in a Christian warfare, and formally to enrol us amongst His soldiers. In this Sacrament the Holy Spirit descends upon us, and consecrates us by the infusion of His grace, and so marks us out for ever as the soldiers of Christ by a special character, and supplies us with the strength to fight our Lord’s battles bravely and successfully.

If we would know how important this Sacrament is, we have only to see how careful our Lord was that His apostles should be duly supplied with the graces and gifts of the Holy Ghost before they set out on their great mission. He Himself had given them all the powers and instructions that they required, but they needed something more to fit them for their work. “You shall receive the power of the Holy Ghost coming upon you, and you shall be witnesses to me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts i. 8). They must wait for the coming down of the Holy Spirit before they could stir one step.

The apostles were to win a great victory, and to overcome all the power and wisdom of this world—but it was to be God's victory, not theirs. He was to supply their arms, and He was to be with them in their strife. "You shall be brought before governors and before kings for my sake, for a testimony to them and to the Gentiles; but when they shall deliver you up, take no thought how or what to speak: for it shall be given to you in that hour what to speak, for it is not you that speak, but the Spirit of your Father that speaketh in you" (St. Matt. x. 18).

The victory was to be the work of God, and the glory of it was to be given to Him. So our Lord commanded His apostles to do nothing till they had received the special graces for their work, just as before He had told them that they must not be encumbered with worldly goods; "Behold I send you as lambs among wolves. Carry neither purse, nor scrip, nor shoes" (St. Luke x. 4).

Every Christian, my dear brethren, has to fight his battle on the same conditions on which the apostles fought: the victory must be won by God's help, and, therefore, we must put on the armour of God, and use all the means of grace offered to us.

Let us now see what were the effects that were produced in the apostles by the coming down of the Holy Ghost, and then we can form an idea of what are the graces which we may expect for ourselves. What strikes us first is the marvellous gift of courage which the Holy Spirit bestowed upon them. Nothing can be more marked than the change that appeared in their conduct from the moment they were filled with the Holy Ghost. Up till that time they had been timid and fearful—fearing the opinions and loud voices of men, and shrinking from the bodily evils and dangers which seemed to threaten them. When our Lord was seized, they all abandoned Him, and the most forward amongst them, St. Peter, even denied that he knew Him; and after the resurrection we find them again sitting timidly in a room, when "the doors were shut, where the

disciples were gathered together, for fear of the Jews" (St. John xx. 19).

After the coming down of the Holy Spirit, when they had received the special grace which was to make them the soldiers of Christ, we find all this changed. St. Peter did not then hesitate to preach Christ to the multitude of the Jews, and to tell them that they had crucified and slain the Holy One of God. Listen to the glorious confession of the name of Jesus which the apostles made before the Princes, and Ancients, and Scribes—that "there is no other name under heaven given to men whereby we must be saved;" and, "if it be just to hear you rather than God, judge ye: for we cannot but speak the things we have seen and heard." And when the world went on from words to blows, and commanded the apostles to be scourged, they "went away from the presence of the council rejoicing that they were accounted worthy to suffer reproach for the name of Jesus" (Acts iv. 12, 19, and v. 41).

The courage which the Holy Spirit bestowed upon them was not merely a passing grace, it was an in-dwelling and habitual fortitude which enabled them to go on fighting the battles of the Lord, and to stand, without fear, before the tribunal of kings and magistrates, which was to be ready for all emergencies, and, at last, to enable them, without shrinking, to meet death for their faith. This is the type of the courage which the Holy Spirit bestows upon the soldiers of Christ in proportion to their needs: if only they live up to the grace given to them, they never need fail in fortitude, however terrible the conflict may be.

But it was not fortitude only that was given to the apostles, as courage alone will not make a soldier: they received also a special gift of wisdom. The apostles had heard the faith from our Lord's own lips: "To you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God" (St. Mark iv. 11); and yet, after all, they did not understand, but remained "foolish and slow of heart to believe in all things which the prophets had spoken" (St. Luke xxiv. 25). The remedy for all slowness or

heart was the coming down of the Holy Ghost: "I have many things to say to you; but you cannot hear them now. But when He, the Spirit of Truth, has come, He will teach you all truth" (St. John xvi. 12); and again: "But the Paraclete, the Holy Ghost whom the Father will send in my name, He will teach you all things, and bring all things to your mind; whatsoever I shall have said to you" (St. John xiv. 26).

The office of the Holy Ghost, therefore, was to complete the teaching of our Lord, by bringing back to the minds of the apostles all His lessons, and enabling them to understand His words—that is, by the gift of spiritual wisdom. The knowledge of spiritual things is a gift which comes from God, which the learning of this world, of itself, can never bestow, and we must look to God Himself to supply us: "I confess to thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hidden these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them to little ones. Yea, Father, for so it hath seemed good in Thy sight" (St. Luke x. 21). But even spiritual knowledge is not enough of itself—indeed, the apostle says: "Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth"—and the great and principal gift of the Holy Spirit is that of divine charity, from which spring the spirit of loyalty and devotion, and all the other qualities of a good soldier of Christ. "The charity of God is poured forth in our hearts by the Holy Ghost who is given to us" (Rom. v. 5).

It was this divine charity which contained in itself abundantly the piety and loyalty, tenderness towards God, and zeal for His honour, that sent the apostles out through the whole world to fight against His enemies, and to brave dangers for His sake. The Holy Spirit appeared and rested upon the apostles in the form of "parted tongues, as it were, of fire," to show that the gift of the Holy Spirit must contain the principle of fervour and devotion as well as of knowledge—that it must inflame as well as enlighten.

I have dwelt on the gifts bestowed on the apostles so long, because we must not forget that they are the



pattern for all Christians. The graces bestowed upon them were for us all, and we were to be supplied, each one according to his necessities, with spiritual weapons like theirs, and it is our own fault if we do not put on the armour of God. It is true, indeed, that they received many supernatural gifts which were not intended for others; but the higher and more spiritual gifts, which the Holy Spirit bestowed on them, were for the Church, to be handed on through countless channels, from one generation to another, till the end of time, as most precious treasures purchased by the Precious Blood of Christ.

If you would value the graces of the Holy Spirit as you should do, my dear brethren, go in spirit to that upper chamber where the apostles and disciples abode, all “persevering in one mind in prayer with the women, and Mary the Mother of Jesus, and His brethren.” They were the Church of God upon earth, completely organised, having full power and authority, wanting in nothing but that spiritual life from on high without which they could not act. “Suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a mighty wind coming, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them parted tongues, as it were, of fire, and it sat upon every one of them: and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they began to speak with divers tongues, according as the Holy Ghost gave them to speak” (Acts ii. 2).

Now the Church has been animated with a divine life; now she has received the fire from on high which shall burst forth from that upper chamber and inflame the whole world, which all ages shall never be able to extinguish. Now that voice has gone forth which has ever since been heard, and which can never be silenced—for “their sound has gone forth into all the earth, and their words unto the end of the whole world” (Rom. x. 19).

But the Church is for individuals, and it would be to little purpose that all these glorious gifts of the spirit had been given to her, if they had not been so given that each Christian soul should share in them. Our Lord therefore ordained that the gifts and graces of His

Divine Spirit should be conveyed to others by the outward and sacramental imposition of hands, as it was miraculously given by the appearance of parted tongues of fire. "Then they laid their hands upon them, and they received the Holy Ghost. And when Simon saw that, by the imposition of the hands of the apostles, the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I shall lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost" (Acts viii. 17).

The Catechism tells us that "the Bishop administers the Sacrament of Confirmation by praying that the Holy Ghost may come down upon those to be confirmed : by laying his hands on them, and making the sign of the cross with chrism on their forehead, at the same time pronouncing certain words," and that the words used in Confirmation are these : "I sign thee with the sign of the cross, and I confirm thee with the chrism of salvation. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen."

In these answers we have expressed the matter, form, and minister of Confirmation. And, first, the ordinary minister is a bishop only. This means that although a priest may give Confirmation under special circumstances—that is, when he has received express authority from the Pope—still, generally speaking, no one who is not a bishop can ever confirm. The reason of this is plain enough : the apostles themselves all received from our Lord the fulness of the priestly power, with authority to communicate their priestly office to others. They chose out some of the disciples to be their assistants, and gave them a portion of their priestly authority to enable them to do the work intrusted to them. In this way they appointed St. Stephen and the rest of the seven deacons, and sent them to preach and to baptize. St. Stephen, "full of grace and fortitude, did great wonders and signs among the people, and they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit that spoke;" "and Philip, going down to the city of Samaria, preached Christ unto them ; and they were baptized both men and women."

But though they had commissioned these men to act as their assistants in the ministry in some things, yet the apostles reserved to themselves the power of communicating the Holy Ghost by the imposition of hands, and, when the people of Samaria had been converted by Philip's preaching, the apostles "sent unto them Peter and John, who, when they were come, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost, for He was not as yet come upon any of them. But they were only baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid their hands upon them, and they received the Holy Ghost" (Acts vi. 8, 10; and viii. 5, 12, 14).

In this manner arose the hierarchy of the Catholic Church, and each order was appointed to assist in the priestly office, and received a share of the priestly power in proportion to their work. As the Church extended, however, it became necessary not merely to appoint assistants, but to send out missionaries to be over the whole work; then the apostles communicated to them the fulness of the priestly power as they had received it from our Lord, and made them "bishops to rule the Church of God" (Acts xx. 28). An instance of this is given in the mission of St. Paul and St. Barnabas: "And as they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Ghost said to them, Separate me Saul and Barnabas, for the work whereunto I have taken them. Then they, fasting and praying, and imposing their hands upon them, sent them away" (Acts xiii. 2).

The Bishops of the Church of God are those who have received the fulness of the priesthood, and to them alone is reserved the power of the imposition of hands, as it was originally to the apostles themselves.

The outward signs which constitute the matter of the Sacrament are two things, each of which, in a different way, represents the effect conferred by it. These are the imposition of hands and the anointing with the holy chrism. The laying on of the Bishop's hand is the outward symbol of the coming down of the Holy Spirit, just as the "parted tongues, as it were, of fire" represented His descent into the hearts of the apostles. The sign of

## CONFIRMATION.

the cross, made with the chrism, represents the special consecration by which the Christian soul is made the temple of the Holy Ghost, and the Christian is marked out, for ever, as the soldier of Christ. The words: "I sign thee with the sign of the cross; I confirm thee with the chrism of salvation," give a special and particular meaning to these external actions, and express the purpose for which the Holy Ghost is invoked, and explain why the special consecration is given.

We have now to ask how the Christian is to be prepared for this great dignity. It is well to speak of this, my dear brethren, for it is your duty to prepare your children, in due time, to receive our Lord's great gift. Christian parents, do you think enough of this duty? Are you truly anxious to see your children ready to put on the armour of God? or do you, by neglect and carelessness, allow them to meet danger unprepared and unstrengthened? If you were sending your sons out as soldiers for an earthly fight you would not neglect to provide for their safety, that they might come back to you unharmed. How do you act in their spiritual warfare?

The first thing is age. Anyone who is baptized is capable of receiving the sacrament of Confirmation; and, in danger of death, it is right to administer it to the children; but the usage of the Church is to confer it at the age of eleven or twelve, when that can be done. That is the time when they have ceased to be mere children, and the serious dangers of life are beginning, and they have to begin a Christian's warfare in real earnest. Age, however, is not enough: they require instruction also. Confirmation may be called the spiritual growing up—the end of their spiritual childhood—by which they are to be made "strong and perfect Christians." "That the man of God may be perfect, furnished to every good work" (2 Tim. iii. 17). Those who are to be confirmed should, therefore, be well instructed in at least such knowledge of the Christian faith and religious practice as is necessary for their state.



We have an example of this previous instruction in the conduct of our Lord to His apostles. The Holy Ghost was to "teach them all truth;" nevertheless, He taught them with His own lips "the mysteries of the kingdom of God," and so prepared them for the infused knowledge of the Holy Spirit by His own distinct teaching. The reason is plain. The Holy Ghost was to be a teacher, not directly, but by "bringing back to their minds" what had been already taught, and enabling them to understand and appreciate it.

All those who are to be confirmed should understand, not only the nature of the Sacrament they are to receive, and the new character and special graces which are to be conferred upon them, but should also have such a knowledge of their faith in all its parts as may be suitable to their age and position. They ought to be prepared, not only by knowledge, but by holiness and devotion: how can anyone aspire to become the temple of God, unless he at least tries to be holy: "for the temple of God is holy, which you are" (1 Cor. iii. 17).

The apostles went through a special time of preparation for the day of Pentecost, and this, though their lives, spent as they were in the company of Jesus, would have seemed to be preparation enough. "He commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but should wait for the promise of the Father;" and they spent ten days in retirement and prayer, in company with "Mary, the Mother of Jesus." Where could they better prepare themselves for the coming of the Holy Spirit, and for His abundant gifts, than in the company of her who was "overshadowed by the Holy Ghost" and "full of grace"?

The essential condition for receiving the Sacrament of Confirmation worthily is to be in a state of grace—that is, free from mortal sin; everyone, therefore, who is to be confirmed, ought to do his best to secure this state of grace by making a good Confession. In addition to this, to receive the Sacrament with fruit, you require prayer and meditation, that you may understand and value the gifts the Spirit of God is to bestow. These are: the mark

and character of soldiers of Christ, the increased "charity of God," which is to be poured into your heart by the presence of God's Holy Spirit, and certain special "sacramental" graces, or the infused habit of certain virtues—which are commonly called the "gifts of the Holy Ghost." These gifts are not given suddenly and miraculously as they were to the apostles, but are to remain in the soul like a treasure to be brought forth when required, and to be increased by diligent exercises.

And now, my dear brethren, you may ask what is the use of dwelling upon the details of this Sacrament, which most of you have already received? It is a long time since you were confirmed; the Bishop whose hands were imposed on you is long since dead; those who knelt beside you are, perhaps, most of them gone, and the day itself has become but a faint memory. Yes; but the mark that was then impressed upon your soul, is still there, and neither time nor eternity can make it fade. You took upon you the character of the soldier of Christ, and, as a soldier of Christ, you will have to be judged.

You have been a soldier of Christ—what sort of a soldier? Have you been loyal to your King and Captain? We know what earthly loyalty is, and what great things men will do and suffer for their king or their cause. Have you shown the same loyalty for your Heavenly Leader? Have you had His interests at heart? Has His honour been to you like your own honour? Have you always stood up manfully for His cause?—or have you betrayed it? The day will come, my dear brethren, when these will be terrible questions for us all. "He who denies me before men shall be denied before the angels of God" (St. Luke xii. 9).

But what sort of soldiers have you been? Have you been brave and steadfast, or have you been mere fair-weather soldiers? You know that soldiers are sometimes to be found, whose appearance is very imposing, and their uniform is gorgeous; but they are only peace soldiers, and are no use when the shock of battle comes. So there are some Christians who appear to be good so long as there is no trouble or difficulty, but "in time of

temptation they fall away." That is not the kind of service which we have promised, and which our Captain expects from us. We cannot be true soldiers unless we are prepared to fight, and, if need be, suffer for our King. "Labour as a good soldier of Christ Jesus . . . for he also that striveth for the mastery is not crowned unless he strive lawfully" (2 Tim. ii. 3). "To him that overcometh I will give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of my God" (Apoc. ii. 7).

Let us, then, fight, my dear brethren, as good soldiers of Christ, and, if we have to suffer something for our faith and loyalty, let us always think of the words of the apostle: "You have not yet resisted unto blood striving against sin" (Heb. xii. 4); and remember that our crown will be in proportion to our fidelity.

We cannot, however, fight as Christian soldiers unless we bring to the battle some of the qualities which an earthly contest requires. It is not enough to have zeal and goodwill; we must also be prepared, when need be, for patience and self-denial. "Everyone that striveth for the mastery refraineth himself from all things: and they, indeed, that they may receive a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible one" (1 Cor. ix. 25). Hence it is that our Lord says, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me" (St. Luke ix. 23). Of ourselves we can do nothing, but, if we faithfully follow Christ and trust in His help, we need fear no enemy.

Let us be good soldiers of Christ, but, in order to be such, we must put on the armour of God to be able "to resist in the evil day, and to stand in all things perfect. Stand, therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breast-plate of justice, and your feet shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace: in all things taking the shield of faith wherewith you may be able to extinguish all the fiery darts of the most wicked one, and take unto you the helmet of salvation and the sword of the spirit, which is the word of God" (Eph. vi. 13). Amen.

# Catholic Sermons

BY REV. J. B. BAGSHAWE.

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## SERMON XXXIX.

### *Penance.*

“And when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and was moved with compassion; and, running to him, fell upon his neck and kissed him” (St. Luke xv. 20).

So far, my dear brethren, I have treated of the Sacraments which can only be once received. These Sacraments imprint upon the soul a special character, and mark an epoch in human existence. The memory of them must be carefully treasured up and meditated upon, because of the permanent responsibilities they have brought with them, but they can never be received again. I now have to speak of Sacraments of another class—of those, that is, which we may call the Sacraments of daily life; these are to be our daily help and continual resource—to be in constant use, as the weapons with which we are to fight our daily battles, and with which we must strike the enemy, not once or twice, but day after day.

It is absolutely essential for us to understand the use of these Sacraments of daily life. See how a soldier practises himself in the use of his weapons. Every day he goes through his exercise, that he may be skilful and quick in the management of his arms: and yet it is not more important for him to be dextrous in using the instruments of war, than it is for a Christian to understand how to make proper use of the Sacraments which our Lord has appointed to help him in his spiritual warfare.

As soon as children are old enough to require and understand these means of grace, they should be most diligently taught what they are, and how best to use them, and then they ought to keep themselves in practice, in order not to forget what they have learned.



To guard against routine—that is, the carelessness arising from long custom—it is very important sometimes to hear or to read instructions and considerations on the use of these Sacraments. It is not enough for a soldier once to have learned his drill,—he must keep himself constantly exercised in the use of the weapons on which his safety depends in war; and, in the same way, it is necessary for a Christian to be always well instructed in the use of the Sacraments of daily life.

These are Penance and the Holy Eucharist. All the other Sacraments, of their own nature, can only be used on particular occasions, when the necessity for them arises; but these two can be used without restriction, whenever we wish to avail ourselves of them. The Holy Eucharist may not be received more than once on the same day—as we shall see—(except under particular circumstances) by a special law of the Church, but we may receive the Sacrament of Penance as often as we please. The reason of this is plain: these Sacraments are the food and medicine of our souls, and food and medicine are required whenever we are hungry, and whenever we are sick.

I am going, to-day, to speak of the Sacrament of Penance, or, as it is commonly called, Confession. Confession is, strictly speaking, as you all know, only one part of the Sacrament, but it is the word commonly used to mean the Sacrament of Penance, including *all* its parts.

Those who are not members of the Catholic Church commonly look upon Confession as a heavy burden laid upon sinners; but this is a very false view of the question. It is, on the contrary, the way in which Almighty God makes it easy for sinners to return to Him; by which He meets them half way—if I may use such an expression. I have alluded in my text to the way in which the father of the prodigal meets his repentant son. Returning to himself, the prodigal said: “I will arise, and will go to my father, and say to him, Father, I have sinned against Heaven and before thee:

I am not now worthy to be called thy son : make me as one of thy hired servants. And, rising up, he went to his father, and when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and was moved with compassion, and, running to him, fell upon his neck and kissed him. And the father said to his servants : Bring forth quickly the first robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet " (St. Luke xv. 17). In the same way, when sinners "return to themselves," God goes to meet them by a Sacrament which is intended to assist their faltering steps, to encourage them in their good resolutions, complete their imperfect penitence, and then restore to them the "first robe"—the robe of sanctifying grace—which they had lost.

When sinners are moved to repentance by the grace of God, and would return from their evil ways, they are frequently almost overwhelmed with difficulties and discouragement; their dispositions are often very imperfect, and their purpose weak and hesitating, and they come, as it were, with faltering steps, like the poor prodigal after his wanderings. Then it is that they sorely need a hand put out to help them; and our Lord has, therefore, established a Sacrament in which His Precious Blood cures all their wounds, and supplies all their wants.

In the earliest of all Christian confessions of faith—the Apostles' Creed—we find one of the articles to be "the forgiveness of sins." This means, not only that God does in some way or other forgive sins, but that in the Christian Church there is some special institution for granting that forgiveness. It would, indeed, be strange if it were not so. Our Lord came down upon this earth to find a remedy for the sins of men, "that transgression may be finished, and sin may have an end, and iniquity may be abolished" (Daniel ix. 24); and St. John says : "You know that He appeared to take away our sins" (1 St. John iii. 5).

As the great object of our Lord's coming was to provide a remedy against sin, it would be hard to suppose that He had not made any special provision for the

pardon of sinners; and, therefore, it seems only natural that the "forgiveness of sins" should be one of the most prominent parts of the Christian doctrine. "In that day there shall be a fountain open to the house of David, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for the washing of the sinner" (Zach xiii. 1). This prophecy is fulfilled in the Christian Church; the "open fountain" is principally the Sacrament of Penance, by which the Precious Blood of Christ is applied for the "washing of the sinner;" and this not once or twice, but whenever human frailty requires it, so that it may well be called an "*open fountain*."

In the Christian Law, moreover, Almighty God was to call men to a much closer union with Himself; it was for this that the Son of God became incarnate, that we might come near to God by the "adoption of sons." What our Lord said to His apostles is, to a great degree, true of all Christians. "I will not now call you servants, but I have called you friends" (St. John xv. 15). And again: "To you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God, but to the rest in parables" (St. Mark iv. 11). Every Christian is called to a much clearer knowledge of God, and a much more intimate union with Him, than was given to the saints of old. It was only natural, then, that our Lord should establish upon earth some distinct means of purification from sin—something which, in a spiritual sense, might be like the great brazen laver, the "molten sea" (3 Kings vi. 23), which was to stand in the temple for the purification of those who went into the holy place.

When our Lord was washing His disciples' feet, He came to St. Peter, "and Peter saith to Him, Thou shalt never wash my feet. Jesus answered him, If I wash thee not, thou shalt have no part with me. Simon Peter saith to Him, Lord, not only my feet, but also my hands and my head" (St. John xiii. 8). Our Lord washes us, first of all, in the Sacrament of Baptism, but this washing cannot be repeated; whereas such is our frailty, that the best of us go on sinning all our days, in some degree or other; and, therefore, our Lord has provided another

laver to cleanse us from the daily stains which we contract.

The Catechism tells us that "the priest forgives sins by the power of God, in pronouncing the words of absolution," and goes on to say that "three conditions for forgiveness are required on the part of the penitent—contrition, confession, and satisfaction." Two things, then, are necessary—one is the power to forgive, and the other the disposition to enable us to receive forgiveness. However complete and unrestricted the power of pardoning may be, it will produce no effect if the person to be pardoned is in such a state of mind as to be *incapable* of pardon. If you attempted to kindle a fire, and the fuel was all saturated with water, you would apply your match in vain, not because the fire would not burn, but because the wood was incapable of being burned. It is necessary for us to say a little about the power of absolution, granted by our Lord to His ministers, and a good deal about the dispositions which are necessary to allow this power to produce its effect.

The Catechism says : "Our Lord instituted the Sacrament of Penance when He breathed upon His apostles, and gave them power to forgive sins, saying, Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven." This power was given to the apostles, to be handed on to their successors in the ministry ; it was clearly not meant for one generation, but for sinful man in all ages, "even to the consummation of the world." Our Lord had prepared the way for the power He was to give to His apostles by Himself exercising the power of forgiving sins at a word. "Be of good heart, son, thy sins are forgiven thee;" and again He says, "You are clean by reason of the word I have spoken to you."

Moreover, he worked a miracle expressly to answer the objection which we ourselves have so often heard. "He saith to the man sick of the palsy, Son, thy sins are forgiven thee. And there were some of the Scribes sitting there, and thinking in their hearts, Why doth this man speak thus? He blasphemeth. Who can forgive sins but God only? Which Jesus presently,



knowing in His spirit that they thought so within themselves, saith to them, Why think you these things in your hearts? Which is easier to say to the sick of the palsy, Thy sins are forgiven thee, or to say, Arise, take up thy bed and walk? But that you may know that the Son of Man hath power on earth to forgive sins (He saith to the sick of the palsy), I say to thee, Arise, take up thy bed, and go into thy house" (St. Mark ii. 5).

Our Lord here seems to claim the power of forgiving sins as "the Son of Man" "on earth," that, when He said to His apostles, "As the Father hath sent me, I also send you." "receive ye the Holy Ghost, whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven" (St. John xx. 21), men might know that the apostles were to exercise in His name the power of absolving from sin.

In order to exercise this power of absolution validly, two things are required—the power of order, and jurisdiction—that is, a priest must not only be properly ordained, but he must also have received authority to act as spiritual judge over some portion of the flock of Christ. A priest, therefore, must be "approved" by the Bishop of the diocese before he can exercise the power of binding and loosing which he received at his ordination. In case of danger of death, however, every priest, validly ordained, has the power of absolving from sin.

I now come to a more practical consideration. What must the penitent do, and what dispositions must he bring, in order that his sins may be remitted by absolution? The conditions for pardon are contrition, confession, and satisfaction. Contrition means a hearty sorrow for past sins, with a purpose of amendment; Confession is to accuse ourselves of our sins to a priest approved by the Bishop; and satisfaction is doing the penance given us by the priest. This we all know very well, my dear brethren, but there is a great deal to be said on each of these conditions.

First let us ask, Why should Confession be required before we can receive pardon? Our sins are known to Almighty God a thousand times better than we know

them ourselves, and it is from Him that the forgiveness really comes ; why must we declare them to the priest, who is only His minister ? From our Lord's words, " Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven ; and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained," it is clear that the apostles and their successors were to exercise their power of forgiving sins as *judges* ; they were to forgive or retain according to the circumstances and necessities of each case ; and such a commission necessarily carries with it authority to *hear* each case. Since our Lord has appointed His ministers to act as judges, it is plain that penitents must put before them the case on which their judgment is to be exercised—that is, they must confess their sins.

People are sometimes inclined to murmur at this, as if it were for us to determine the conditions on which God should pardon sin. If we only knew how great an act of mercy it is to forgive us our sins on *any* terms, we should never complain of the simple and easy things which our Lord has appointed as the condition of forgiveness. The difficulties which people make only show how little idea they have of the enormity and misery of sin : if a sinner would only listen to the words of the prophet : " Know thou, and see that it is an evil and a bitter thing for thee to have left the Lord thy God " (Jer. ii. 19)—if he would only take these words to heart, he would not complain of any remedy that our Lord might please to appoint.

It is plain, then, that it is for our Lord to lay down the terms of forgiveness according to His own good pleasure, and that we have no right to murmur. There is a history in the Old Testament which puts this in a very clear light. We are told in the 4th Book of Kings about Naaman : he was " general of the army of the King of Syria : he was a valiant man, and rich, but a leper." He had heard of the prophet of God, Eliseus, and he made a journey, carrying with him " ten talents of silver, and six thousand pieces of gold, and ten changes of raiment," hoping to be miraculously cured of his leprosy. " So Naaman came with his horses and chariots, and stood at

the door of the house of Eliseus. And Eliseus sent a messenger to him, saying : Go, and wash seven times in the Jordan, and thy flesh shall recover health, and thou shalt be clean. Naaman was angry, and went away saying : I thought he would have come out to me, and, standing, would have invoked the name of the Lord his God, and touched with his hand the place of the leprosy, and healed me. Are not the Abana and the Pharphar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel, that I may wash in them and be made clean? So, as he turned, and was going away with indignation, his servants came to him, and said to him : Father, if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, surely thou shouldst have done it : how much rather what he now hath said to thee : Wash, and thou shalt be clean. Then he went down and washed in the Jordan seven times, according to the word of the man of God, and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was made clean " (4 Kings v. 1).

Now, my dear brethren, we should all agree that if Naaman had gone away in his anger, and refused to do what the prophet told him, he would have deserved to be a leper for the rest of his life, and no one would have pitied him. What, then, shall we find to say for ourselves if we will not make use of the simple and easy remedy which it has pleased our Lord to appoint as a cure of the leprosy of sin? "If he had bid thee do some great thing, surely thou shouldst have done it"—much more when He asks so little of you.

We may not, therefore, call in question the conditions on which Almighty God pleases to forgive our sins, and it is foolish and presumptuous to think some other way would have been better. It is for our Lord to appoint the remedies He thinks fit, and for us thankfully to make use of them. Moreover, we may be quite sure that the remedies which He has chosen are wise and good in their own nature, and well suited for the purposes for which He has appointed them—even if we do not ourselves see the necessity or advantage of them. "Great are the works of the Lord, *sought out* according to all His wills" (Ps. cx. 2).

It is, well however, to consider the object and utility of the practice of sacramental Confession in itself, that we may be able to enter more heartily into the work which our Lord has given us to do. Confession is, of all things, the best calculated to give us a knowledge of ourselves. "To know God, and to know ourselves," is the foundation of a good life, and there are multitudes who go astray because they never look into themselves, and are strangers to their own hearts and to their own sins. The first step of the prodigal was, as we see, to look into himself, and consider the condition in which he was placed—"Returning to himself." Without this self-knowledge repentance is almost impossible. "And the Lord God called Adam, and said to Him, Where art thou?" So when we have sinned, the first inspiration of grace is to make us find out the condition in which we are, "Where art thou?"

The first idea of all sinners is to hide themselves amongst the branches as Adam did—that is, to put their sins out of sight, so as to hide themselves from themselves. The obligation of confessing our sins, at any rate, compels us to know something about them ourselves, and to know them, not merely in the vague and superficial way in which we make up accounts for ourselves, but with some degree of accuracy, so as to be able to give an account of them to others. The necessity of looking carefully into all that is going wrong, is, in itself, a very great check and safeguard. Suppose, for instance, that a spendthrift could be brought to keep an accurate account of every penny that he squandered, so that every foolish item of expense was frequently brought before his eyes, can you doubt that his extravagance would speedily be cured? It is the fact that he does not think what he spends, or what debts he is incurring, that makes him so reckless.

It is the same thing with sinners. Men very often persevere in their sins chiefly because they will never allow themselves to think of them, or to dwell on the great responsibility they are incurring. If a sinner could be brought to look his iniquities steadily in the face, and



to keep an account of them, it would be almost impossible for him to persevere, for any long time, in a state of sin. The Psalmist says: "I know my iniquity, and my sin is always before me" (Ps. l. 5). If we knew our iniquities as he did we should soon imitate his repentance. The very object of sacramental Confession is, if possible, to compel us to know at least *something* of ourselves and our own consciences.

As a general rule, moreover, we all require advice and spiritual assistance. It is a mistake to suppose that a man's "common sense" and conscience will always guide him in matters of right and wrong. However well instructed and enlightened men are, they are generally very bad judges in their own case, and often want counsel in the things that concern their own souls. When St. Paul was converted, and had cast himself down before our Lord, with the words, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" the answer was, "Arise, and go into the city, and there it will be told thee what thou must do." St. Paul's conversion was miraculous. The Lord took it out of the hands of men, and was Himself the instrument of his conversion; and yet, the moment his conversion was complete, he was put into the hands of men for guidance. Ananias came to him and said: "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus hath sent me, He that appeared to thee in the way as thou camest, that thou mayest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost" (Acts ix. 17).

We cannot, then, well be surprised if our Lord, in the ordinary course of His Providence, refers *us* also to Ananias, and requires us to learn His will, and to be guided by some of His ministers here on earth; and it is just this which He has done in the institution of the sacrament of Penance. People are often very much troubled, and sometimes suffer serious injury, for want of a little good counsel. Sometimes this is by over-scrupulousness, which leads them to see evil where none exists, or to take exaggerated and impossible views of their duty; sometimes, and still more frequently, the evil comes from failing to see the importance of things

at the beginning, and thereby becoming entangled in danger and difficulty before they are aware of it.

Confession is, of its own nature, difficult and repugnant; and yet it is the very thing which comes home to the heart of man as the best reparation for crime. The Holy Scripture says: "The just man is the first accuser of himself" (Prov. xviii. 17), and the society of men looks for this self-accusation. Josue said to Achan, when his iniquity was discovered: "My son, give glory to the Lord God of Israel, and confess, and tell me what thou hast done: hide it not" (Jos. vi. 19). In the same way, if a man has committed a murder, and is convicted of his crime, everybody thinks that the least he can do is to confess his crime. His doing so will make no difference to himself, or to anyone else, and yet it is felt that it is the reparation which he owes to his fellow-men. We sometimes even hear of criminals who are so driven on by the sort of necessity of confessing their guilt, that they are willing to give themselves up to justice rather than conceal their sin any longer.

In the same way, an honest confession of our sins against God is pointed out to us by nature as one of the best ways of making atonement for our wickedness; and we cannot be surprised that our Lord should have made such a confession one of the conditions of pardon. When the prodigal son returned to his father, he began by a humble confession of his fault: "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee: I am not now worthy to be called thy son;" and this confession was followed by a complete pardon. In the same way, Christ has appointed for us that we should first confess our sins, and then receive His forgiveness.

Confession is also a suitable remedy for sin, because it is so much opposed to the spirit of pride. It is scarcely possible to imagine any act which is a greater humiliation than the confession of sin. To declare one's iniquities, and humbly to profess sorrow, and devoutly promise amendment at the feet of one of one's own brethren, is an act which is strongly opposed to every feeling of

self-love and self-exaltation. It is this which makes it so valuable a remedy against sin. A large proportion of our sins have their beginning in pride, and they cannot be effectually cured without some kind of humiliation. It is "the pride of life" which makes men lift themselves up against God and break His Commandments. "The beginning of the pride of man is to fall off from God: because His heart is departed from Him that made him, for pride is the beginning of all sin" (Ecclus. ix. 14). Since pride is the beginning of sin, no remedy can be complete which does not, in some way, involve the subjugation of the pride of man. "Our Lord Jesus Christ humbled Himself, becoming obedient unto death" (Phil. ii. 8), to purchase the pardon of our sins. It is not wonderful, therefore, that He should require some little humiliation on our part when we come to ask pardon for our own sins.

These, my dear brethren, are some of the ways in which Confession is fitted to supply a remedy to the great evil of sin. If we make diligent use of it, it will enable us to know ourselves: to see the faults into which we are betrayed, and the dangers to which we are exposed. Confession is, in itself, a remedy to the pride which is constantly leading us into sin, and provides us with a suitable way of making reparation for our offences; and, in Confession, moreover, we shall hear the voice of God, and "it will be told us what we must do." The best reason of all for Confession, however, is that it has pleased our Lord Jesus to institute it, and the least and meanest instrument which He has appointed will work more good than all the contrivances which the wisdom of men can design. We are sinners: let us diligently use His remedy for sin, and, if it is sometimes painful and humbling, let us rejoice to share in the pain and ignominy of the cross which He bore for our sins.

# Catholic Sermons

BY REV. J. B. BAGSHAWE.

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## SERMON XL.

### *Confession.*

“And the dead were judged by those things which were written in the books” (Apoc. xx. 12).

THE Sacrament of Penance, my dear brethren, is an anticipation of the great judgment to come. St. Paul says: “If we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged; but whilst we are judged, we are chastised by the Lord, that we be not condemned with this world” (1 Cor. xi. 31). These words we may very well apply to the Sacrament of Penance: in it our Lord allows us to provide against the terrible day of His wrath, by appearing before a tribunal in which we ourselves are the accusers and witnesses, the judge is a friend and advocate, and the “chastisement of the Lord” is simply that we “may not be condemned with this world.”

Confession, then, is the judgment-seat of God upon earth, but it is most unlike that fearful tribunal which St. John describes to us when he “saw a great white throne, and One sitting upon it, from whose face the earth and heaven fled away, and there was no place found for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing in the presence of the throne, and the books were opened; and the sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and hell gave up the dead that were in them; and they were judged every one according to their works” (Apoc. xx. 11).

The tribunal of Penance is a tribunal of mercy, in which our Lord sits, not as the stern judge to exact the last farthing, but as the Father of the prodigal, only waiting to hear the few words of repentance, in order to be able to clothe his son once more in the first robe. It is the court in which our Lord looks not to His own



interests and the claims of His justice, but simply to the benefit of those who apply to Him—that he may show them how to “escape from the wrath to come.” The Psalmist says: “Look thou upon me, and have mercy on me, according to the judgment of them that love Thy name” (Ps. cxviii. 132). The Sacrament of Penance is, then, the tribunal where we shall find the tender and lenient judgment with which God judges those who love His name.

It is the special terror of the judgment to come, that our sins shall be manifested before heaven and earth; that all creation shall see the treason and ingratitude of men, and that the veils in which sinners hide themselves shall be torn away, and their iniquity disclosed: but in His tribunal on earth our Lord judges in secret. He makes us our own accusers and witnesses, and almost our own judges: he leaves the execution of His sentence entirely to ourselves. Moreover, He covers over all the proceedings of this court with the strictest secrecy, so that not a word may, under any circumstances, be revealed. The priest who hears the Confession in the name of God is bound by the most absolute *seal* of secrecy which exists on earth. He cannot reveal anything entrusted to him under this seal, for the sake of any possible advantage that may arise to himself, or to society, or to the Church; he cannot speak of what has happened in Confession to *anyone*, either to the penitent himself or to any other.

In all external things, then, the tribunal of Penance is the opposite of God’s great judgment, but still it must in some way resemble it, because it *is* God’s judgment, and His judgments must always be real, and right, and true: “Thou art just, O Lord, and all thy judgments are just, all Thy ways mercy, and truth, and judgment” (Job. iii. 2). We will now, therefore, consider some of the qualities which must accompany a Confession of sin to make it fulfil the conditions necessary for the Sacrament.

The first of all qualities in Confession is honesty: to be sincere and straightforward. A Confession which is not

honest is a detestable hypocrisy, hateful alike to God and men. If, for example, anyone were to go to Confession, and to tell very carefully all the little things he had done, but were to leave out those of importance; it is quite clear that his Confession would only be a mockery. It would be far better for him if he did not make a Confession at all, because such an insincere Confession is a direct affront to Almighty God and a profanation of His Sacrament.

The Catechism says: "A person who conceals a mortal sin in Confession tells a lie to the Holy Ghost, and is guilty of a great sacrilege by making a bad Confession." We cannot better illustrate this than by considering the history of Ananias and Saphira, from which the expression "telling a lie to the Holy Ghost" is taken. Ananias was a man who, with Saphira, his wife, sold a piece of land, and pretended to give the price of it to the Church, but "by fraud kept back part of the price of the land, his wife being privy thereunto: and bringing a certain part of it, laid it at the feet of the apostles. But Peter said: Ananias, why hath Satan tempted thy heart, that thou shouldst lie to the Holy Ghost, and by fraud keep part of the price of the land? Whilst it remained, did it not remain to thee? and after it was sold, was it not in thy power? Why hast thou conceived this thing in thy heart? Thou has not lied to men, but to God. And Ananias, hearing these words, fell down and gave up the ghost" (Acts v. 2).

Now, consider, my dear brethren, how exactly the conduct of Ananias corresponds with that of a man who goes to Confession and wilfully leaves out what he is bound to confess. He goes to his confessor and solemnly declares, before God and the court of heaven, that he has sinned by thought, word, and deed: through his fault, through his most grievous fault: and then he goes on to declare in what his fault has consisted; but, instead of doing so honestly, he "by fraud keeps back a part"—and a serious part, which he perfectly well knows will render all that he is doing a profane mockery. He tells a lie to God, too, exactly in the

same way in which Ananias told it: he tells it to the priest who is sitting there, not for himself, as if it were his own personal concern, but in the place of God—just as Ananias lied to St. Peter when he was representing Almighty God as the ruler of the Christian Church.

A bad Confession is, therefore, one of the greatest of sacrileges, and also one of the most foolish and dangerous crimes that can be committed. It is foolish, because the person who makes a bad Confession takes a great deal of trouble with no other result than offending God and inflicting a fresh wound on his own conscience. He knows quite well that by doing so he can get no pardon and peace, but that, on the contrary, he is making his return to God very much more difficult. After his bad Confession, he is bound to confess all his sins over again, including the sins fraudulently kept back, and the sin of sacrilege which he has just committed. If he found it hard to make a good Confession before, it will be still more difficult now, and he has, as it were, poisoned the very source of grace, and put himself in great danger of perdition.

Sincerity, therefore, is the first essential to Confession—and with real sincerity of purpose every difficulty easily disappears. It is not, however, quite enough—you must add reasonable diligence to your sincerity. You go to “render an account of your stewardship”—and it would be a mockery to pretend to do this if you did not take pains to make it reasonably complete. You profess to give an account of your sins as you know them yourself—but, by this, you also profess to endeavour to know them yourself. A penitent is not bound to use any extraordinary or unusual care to obtain complete accuracy in his account of himself, but he *is* bound to use at least the care which he would employ in any other serious and important work.

He is bound to confess all mortal sins. I will not here go into the question of the exact distinction between mortal and venial sin, and what it is that constitutes the immense difference that there is between them. It is enough to say, that mortal sin is always something



that is done with full knowledge and deliberation. If you know that a certain action, or thought, or word will grievously offend Almighty God, and when you have time to remember this, you deliberately commit it, you are guilty of mortal sin. Every such sin must be told in Confession—if you remember it—and it is a sacrilege to omit it.

You are not bound in the same way to mention venial sins, because these are “more easily pardoned” than mortal sin—and there are other ways in which it can be forgiven—and still more, because such sins of their own nature are very frequent, and it would be very difficult to give a complete account of them.

Mortal sin is sometimes called the *necessary* matter of the Sacrament, because by divine law we are obliged to submit every mortal sin of which we are conscious to the “power of keys”—that is, to the judgment of the tribunal He has left on earth. Venial sin is called *sufficient* matter, because, although we are not obliged to confess venial sins, it is desirable to do so, and they are a sufficient reason for receiving sacramental absolution.

In making your Confession it is, generally speaking, profitable, and, for many reasons, desirable, to include all the principal venial sins of which you are guilty. You would give a very unsatisfactory view of your conscience if you mentioned nothing that was not actually a mortal sin: just as a steward would give a poor account of his stewardship if he made no mention of the smaller affairs entrusted to him.

To be complete, then, a Confession must declare all mortal sins, and, for your own greater advantage, should include all venial sins that can easily be remembered; but it wants something more. It must also say something about the frequency and the circumstances of sins. If, for instance, you confessed a sin, and didn't say whether it had happened once, or was the constant habit of your life, it is clear that you would not have made a complete and straightforward Confession. You are bound to tell the number of times you have sinned; but here is the difficulty. There are a few things which come back to your mind



in a very distinct form—you can remember one, two, or three occasions on which a sin has been committed; there all is plain enough. Generally, however, things are remembered vaguely, as more or less habitual faults, and you cannot recall the particular occasions. In such things there is no use in attempting imaginary numbers. For instance, if you say that you have lost your temper twenty times, or fifty times, a week, or since your last Confession, it sometimes conveys no particular idea either to yourself or anyone else. You can form a much better notion in such cases by considering how far the sin is habitual—whether it is *very* frequent, frequent, or rare, than by merely guessing at the number of times.

And now for the circumstances which attend sins. It is plain that some circumstances must be mentioned, or the Confession would only be a sham. Very often one act is a sin against two Commandments, and you must explain that you have broken these two Commandments. For instance, a lie which did your neighbour a serious injury—ruined him, perhaps—would be a sin against *two* Commandments. It would be a sin of lying, and a sin of injustice by doing an unjust injury to your neighbour. If you merely said that you had told a lie, you would not have honestly confessed your sin. The same would be true if a thief had broken into the church and stolen some of the things consecrated to God. If he were simply to accuse himself of the theft, and leave out the sacrilege, it is plain that he would have made a very imperfect Confession, and so of a great many other cases. Whenever, then, the circumstances change the *nature* of the sin committed we are bound to mention them.

But what about other circumstances—about those things which do not alter the nature of the sin, but give it an individual character, and make the act somewhat better or worse? There is a good deal of difficulty about this question. Your object is to give an honest and true account of yourself, and one which will render it possible for you to receive advice suited to your necessities. It is, generally speaking, impossible to do this without saying *something* of the circumstances under which

things have happened. If you confine yourself to general terms, and to words which may mean almost anything or nothing, so that it is impossible for your confessor to understand what it is *precisely* that you mean to convey, it is plain that he cannot advise you, and must be talking at random. In such a case, even if you have said enough to make your Confession an honest one, you cannot expect much assistance. It is, therefore, generally expedient to say enough of the circumstances of the case to make it quite clear what sort of thing you mean to confess, without going into histories and without mentioning other people.

Let me here say a word or two about generalities. It is very easy to accuse yourself in general terms, but there is no humility in it. However strong you make your words, it is generally mere waste of time, and is, occasionally, only vanity in disguise. If you declare that you are a very great sinner, or that you do not love God enough, or that you do not correspond as you ought with God's grace, you are only saying what all the rest of the world might say, and your confessor is not in the least the wiser. There is much more difficulty and much greater humility in confessing the most commonplace, every-day sin, in plain terms, which show precisely the wrong you have been doing.

It often happens that sins are omitted in Confession by accident, without any fault. This does not interfere with the substantial "integrity" of the Confession, and all sins—those forgotten as well as those remembered—are forgiven by the Sacrament, if it is received with the due dispositions. Supposing, however, that grievous sins, which have been forgotten, afterwards come back to your remembrance, you are strictly bound to confess them, although they have already been forgiven.

Next to integrity of Confession comes simplicity of manner. The language becoming such a tribunal should be free from any affectation of fine words or unnatural phraseology. You should say what you have to say in the most straightforward, natural, and every-day language you can think of. People sometimes consider

it necessary to begin every sentence with, "I accuse myself," or other such artificial expressions. It is plain that you are accusing yourself, and there is no use going on saying so. People sometimes also think it necessary to confess their sins in some special order—for instance, "against the First Commandment," "against the Second," and so forth. The effect of such an arrangement sometimes is to make a simple thing difficult and complicated. The obvious plan is to mention first what strikes you as most serious and important, and not to trouble yourself with any other arrangement.

The very essence of Confession is self-accusation. "I said I will confess against myself—my iniquities to the Lord: and thou hast forgiven the wickedness of my sin" (Ps. xxxi. 5). A Confession, therefore, is not a mere narration—a mere talking about oneself; it is *accusing* oneself. You know what an accuser does. He stands forward and tells the worst he knows; he puts things in the plainest and strongest way, and doesn't try to shelter the person whom he is accusing, but brings him before the judge as a criminal. This is the way in which we are to confess our own sins. Our Lord has left it to us to be our own accusers, and we must do the work honestly; we must tell our own faults, and acknowledge them and admit them as faults we are sorry for, without trying to make out a good case for ourselves. It is very important to remember that Confession ought to be sincere self-accusation, in which we are not to bring in the faults of our neighbours, and are not to talk unnecessarily of our own doings, or excuse our faults. "Incline not my heart to evil ways, to make excuses in sins" (Ps. cxl. 4). To make excuses in sins is at all times an evil, but especially when we appear as our own accusers. If there are any real excuses, or palliations, for our faults, we may be quite sure that Almighty God will give us full credit for them, and the more so if we are not too anxious to find them for ourselves.

We ought not to speak of the faults of others, as I have just said, because Confession is not intended to give an opportunity for accusing others, but that we



may tell our own faults. In Confession you are never bound to disclose the name of another person, and ought not to do so; and it is a great abuse of the Sacrament when people have a great deal to say about their neighbours which they pretend to consider necessary to explain their own faults. Generally it is quite unnecessary and useless.

In Confession we profess to give a complete account of our sins, either for the whole of our lives, or for a certain period. On special occasions it may be expedient to go over the sins of a lifetime, but generally we only include the time since the last Confession. To give such an account, the Confession must embrace the *whole* of our conduct, and sins of omission as well as sins of commission; not only the bad things we have done, but the good things we have left undone. It is, however, a very common thing, my dear brethren, for people to take one or two points of their conduct, and give all their attention to them, whilst they neglect the rest. They are, perhaps, scrupulous and over minute about the few points to which they attend, but they leave a large part of their conscience unheeded.

It is just as if you had a large field to cultivate, and you gave all your labour to one little corner, and were perpetually working at it, whilst all the rest was lying uncultivated. Instead of doing this, each one ought to look carefully at all the duties and responsibilities which God has laid upon him, and, as far as possible, satisfy himself that he is at least trying to do what God requires of him.

The great judgment, my dear brethren, will pass over nothing; our hearts, our tongues, our hands will all have to answer for their deeds; we shall have to be judged as husbands and fathers, as priests and laymen, as members of society and as working men. We must render an account of our doings as subjects of the Queen and members of the Church, as well as servants of God, and the faults which we have committed in every one of these positions will be revealed. It is necessary, therefore, that when we judge ourselves we should carefully consider all the duties for which we are responsible.



I have now to say a few words about the choice of a confessor. The Church gives us the widest power of choosing for ourselves. You may make your Confession to any priest who is approved by the Bishop of the diocese, or, as we commonly say, has faculties for hearing Confessions. Some Sacraments ought properly only to be administered by the parish priest, but Penance is *not* one of these. It is evidently the intention of the Church that each one should select the confessor whom he thinks most likely to profit him, and no one has a right to be offended if you make the freest possible use of this privilege. You can go to whom you please, and change as often as you like, just as your own feelings and convenience may suggest.

A good Christian in this matter should think of *nothing* but the welfare of his own soul; he should not care who is pleased or who is displeased by the choice he makes; he should not consider who is pleasant or unpleasant, but simply think which confessor will best help him to heaven.

There are two things, however, to be considered in making this choice. It is not expedient to change your confessor without some reason; it stands to reason that you cannot get much advice or assistance from a director who knows nothing about you, and frequent changes are generally made out of levity and curiosity. It is not expedient to choose a confessor who lives a long way off, so that you cannot easily have access to him. On great occasions you have a perfect right to consult anybody you please as to your difficulties and wants, but it is very foolish to be dependent upon anyone at a distance for the Sacraments of "daily life." Above all things, do not attach too much importance to the particular priest to whom you make your Confession. When this is the case, when people are so much attached to one confessor that they cannot be persuaded to go to any other, and would rather remain away from the Sacraments, it looks as if they cared more about the words of a man than about the Sacrament instituted by our Lord.

What we have to look to in all the Sacraments is our

Lord. The priest is only His minister, and, whether he is wise or simple, good or bad, the effect of the Sacrament is, in substance, the same. You may obtain accidental assistance from the wise direction of a prudent confessor, but the principal thing is to receive the grace which our Lord has provided for you in His Sacrament. Our Lord can, if He will, make Himself heard to you by the mouth of the most ordinary confessor as well as by the wisdom of the wisest, so that we ought not to think too much of the particular priest who administers the Sacrament.

It will be well to conclude what I have been saying by a few words about the confession of sins in the early Church. It will do us good to hear what the early fathers say on the subject—partly that we may see how their ideas agree with our own, and partly because they speak in very strong and determined language, such as preachers do not always like to use in the present day. In their time men were full of faith and fervour, and did not require to have everything made so easy for them.

Tertullian was a priest at Carthage nearly seventeen centuries ago, and I would recommend his words to those who make great difficulties and are very shy in the confession of their sins: "Brave art thou in thy modesty truly, bearing an open front in sinning, and a bashful one in praying for pardon! . . . Verily, the concealment of a sin promises a great benefit to our modesty—namely, that if we withdraw anything from the knowledge of men, we shall, of course, conceal it also from God! And is it thus, then, that the thoughts of men and the knowledge of God are compared? Is it better to be damned in secret than absolved openly? It is a miserable thing thus to come to Confession. For by sin we are brought into misery; but when we are to be penitent the misery ceases, for it has become salutary."

These, my dear brethren, are very plain and strong words, and a priest now may use them as freely as Tertullian did in the second century. Again he says: "If thou drawest back from Confession, consider in thy

heart that hell-fire which Confession shall quench for thee; and first imagine to thyself the greatness of the punishment, that thou mayest not doubt concerning the adoption of the remedy. When, therefore, thou knowest that, against hell-fire, after that first protection of Baptism ordained by the Lord, there is yet, in Confession, a second aid, why dost thou abandon thy salvation? Why delay to enter on that which thou knowest will heal thee? Even dumb and unreasoning creatures know, at the season, the remedies which are given them from God."

Confession, in the early ages, was sometimes made publicly; but in general as we now make it—that is, in private, each one to his own confessor. I will, therefore, finish by quoting what another father says on the choice of a confessor, which may be useful to us now. The writer is Origen, a priest who lived in the Eastern Church about the same time as Tertullian—that is, in the second and third centuries; he says: "If a man becomes his own accuser, while he accuses himself and confesses, he at the same time ejects the sin and digests the whole cause of the disease. Only look diligently round to whom thou oughtest to confess thy sin. Prove first the physician to whom thou shouldst set forth the cause of thy sickness; who knows how to be weak with the weak, to weep with the weeping; who knows the art of condoling and sympathising: so that, in fine, thou mayest do and follow whatever he shall have said, whatever council he shall have given, he who shall first have shown himself a skilful and compassionate physician. If he shall have understood and foresee that thy sickness is such as ought to be set forth and cured in the assembly of the whole Church, and, thereby, perhaps others be edified, and thou thyself easily cured, this must be prescribed with much deliberation, and on the very experienced advice of that physician" (Waterworth's "Faith of Catholics," vol. iii. pp. 42, 43, 48).

# Catholic Sermons

BY REV. J. B. BAGSHAWE.

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## SERMON XLI.

BY REV. C. HARINGTON MOORE.

*Christmas.*

"On earth peace to men of good will" (St. Luke ii. 14).

CHRISTMAS is the great national festival of the English people. Its inner meaning, it is true, is in measure lost sight of, although the outward tokens of joy are abundant. Christmas is the season for large-heartedness and charity to those who are in need. It is the time for reciprocal acts of kindness. It is the moment when the scattered members of a family strive to meet once again, as of yore, around the fireside of the old home. But just as the brilliancy of a sunset points to the glory of the orb, which has vanished, so the glow and the glamour of Christmas-tide, in reality, tell us of an Incarnate Lord. They are the Divine rays which shoot from the stable at Bethlehem; and, if this be lost sight of, Christmas joy is but empty and hollow. It is as though men came to the manger and gazed at the ox and the ass, but left the Divine Child unnoticed. "These ought ye to have done, and not to have left the other undone." To the Christian heart it is the expression of overflowing thankfulness that "this day is born to you a Saviour," but to the rest it is but a meaningless festival, often marred by excesses, and given over to the pleasures of the world.

Let us bring before the mind's eye the mystery which the Church contemplates on this feast of our Lord's birth. "Mary and Joseph and the Infant lying in a manger." The town is Bethlehem in Judæa, the city of David, and thither came Mary and Joseph from Nazareth in Galilee, being "of the house and family of David," in compliance with a decree of Cæsar Augustus, the Roman



Emperor, for the purpose of being enrolled. This enrolment was something like our census, only accomplished with far greater expense and inconvenience to individuals than now. And while they were there, "her days were accomplished, that she should be delivered." Christ the King is at hand, but where are the preparations? The inn is full. First come, first served. There are others to be considered before the humble carpenter. Every available lodging is crowded, and so they must needs shelter themselves in a cave, about two hundred paces from the town, used, as is often the case in the East, as a stable. And here, with straw for a carpet, a manger for His cradle, in company with the beasts of the field, the mystery of the Incarnation is accomplished, and Jesus Christ is born of a Virgin Mother, through the power of the Holy Ghost, without having man for His father. Here, in the silence of the night, Mary and Joseph make their first act of adoration of the Infant, who was Almighty God, as well as man like ourselves. And from the starry heavens angel voices sing to the shepherds who are guarding their flocks among the hills of Judæa: "Glory to God in the highest; and on earth peace to men of good will."

Blessed peace! In this is summed up all that Christ has done for us. He has brought peace. This includes all the rest.

Peace to the Jew of old signified every good and every blessing. It meant joy and prosperity. This runs all through the Old Testament. "I will give peace in your coasts: you shall sleep, and there shall be none to make you afraid" (Leviticus xxvi. 6).

The blessing wherewith Aaron and his sons blessed the people of Israel was a blessing of peace. "The Lord turn His countenance to thee, and give thee peace" (Numbers vi. 26). The Psalmist loves to linger on this subject. "The Lord will bless His people with peace" (Psalm xxviii. 11). "Who hath placed peace in thy borders, and filleth thee with the fat of corn" (Psalm cxlvii. 14).

The prophets are full of the same theme. Isaiah calls

the Child that was to be born, "The Prince of Peace" (Isaiah ix. 6). And going on to speak of His kingdom he says: "His empire shall be multiplied, and there shall be no end of peace" (Isaiah 7).

And when we come to the New Testament, peace echoes through every page. But now it is a higher, more supernatural peace—the peace of which the angels sang that first Christmas night—the peace which the Divine Infant of Bethlehem brought to the sons of men. "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you: not as the world giveth, do I give to you" (St. John xiv. 27).

"On earth peace." Let us then consider, first, what this peace includes; next, its conditions.

It is a three-fold peace.

I. With God.

(1.) The peace of pardoned offenders. To have a clear idea what this means, let us bring to mind what we mean by the doctrine of the Incarnation. The whole human race descends from Adam. All are partakers of the consequences of his fall. "In Adam all die." Sprung from a corrupt stock, conceived and born in sin, the sentence of death has gone forth against us, from the first moment of our existence. Had not Divine Mercy stepped in, we must hopelessly and for ever have been excluded from the kingdom of heaven. The offence was infinite, because committed against one who is infinitely exalted, and whose claims to our love and service infinitely surpass all other claims; because, moreover, it contains, so far as is possible, an infinite malice, and is an offence against a Being of infinite goodness and holiness. Behold man laden with a debt of infinite satisfaction to God's offended Majesty. How, I ask, could he, fallen as he is, discharge such an obligation, burdened as he is with sin? How could the finite pay an infinite debt? God, who is all-just, as well as all-merciful, exacts an adequate atonement for the offence committed. Who will stand in the breach and save the world? No creature can do it.

The offence is, as far as it can be, infinite; the satisfaction, also, must be infinite. None can accomplish it but one who is at the same time God and man. God, else the satisfaction could not be infinite; and man, for otherwise he could not suffer and die for us. A vicarious sacrifice is necessary. "Without shedding of blood there is no remission." Who will stand in the breach? The Eternal Son, the Second Person of the Trinity, was moved with compassion towards us, and took to Himself a body and soul like ours; in the unity of His one Divine Person, He became man for us. He is perfect God and perfect Man. Retaining still His Divine nature in all its integrity, He took to Himself, in the unity of His one Divine Person, all that is required to constitute a perfect and complete human nature. He became like us in all things except sin. He took a real body like ours, a real soul, a human will. And in this, our human nature, He offered Himself a sacrifice to God for our sins. He became our substitute. Of His own free will He underwent the penalty we owed for our transgressions. He poured out the last drop of His Precious Blood on the Cross to redeem and save us. "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us" (Gal. iii. 13). "You are not redeemed with corruptible things as gold and silver . . . but with the Precious Blood of Christ" (1 St. Peter i. 18, 19). "*O felix culpa*," exclaims the Church in the office for Holy Saturday. "O happy fault that merited to have such and so great a Redeemer." O come, all ye faithful—come in spirit to the manger of Bethlehem. "*Venite adoremus*." "Prostrate I adore Thee, Hidden Deity." "*Præstet fides supplementum*." "Faith for all defects supplying where the feeble senses fail." To all appearance, indeed, it is but a helpless infant; but to the eye of faith, Jesus Christ, true God and true man—our Blessed Redeemer, who, even in this stable, commences the work of Redemption by offering to Divine Justice His infant tears, and making the oblation of Himself as the victim of expiation.

(2) But the Holy Child has brought us not only the

peace of pardoned offenders, but the peace of sonship. "When the fulness of the time was come, God sent His Son, made of a woman—made under the law—that He might redeem them that were under the law; that we might receive the adoption of sons" (Gal. vi. 4, 5). Christ is a son by natural right; through Him, and in Him, we are made adopted sons, by grace.

Born into this world, sons of Adam, we bear the curse of Adam upon us. "But as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive" (1 Cor. xv. 22). "We are translated," says the Holy Council of Trent (Sess. vi. c 4), "by the laver of regeneration," *i.e.* by Baptism, "from that state in which we were born children of the first Adam, into the state of grace, and of the adoption of the sons of God, through the second Adam, Jesus Christ our Saviour." It is then that we receive "power to become the sons of God" (St. John i. 12). It is then that we "are born not of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." "We receive the spirit of adoption of sons, whereby we cry Abba (Father)" (Rom. viii. 15).

Again, this sonship brings with it the right to be inheritors of the kingdom of heaven. "If sons, heirs also, heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ" (Rom. viii. 17). "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, according to His great mercy, hath regenerated us into a lively hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, unto *an inheritance* incorruptible and undefiled and that cannot fade, reserved in heaven" (1 St. Peter i. 3, 4).

The Incarnation of Jesus Christ, then, brings us the peace of sonship. We are a united family. Our heavenly Father smiles upon us; Jesus is our elder brother. A few more rolling years, a few more conflicts, a little more waiting, and we shall see before us the gates of the city, all of pearl, and the streets of gold, and the walls of precious stones, and the "river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb" (Apoc. xxii. 1).

What wonder that the Christmas carol of the angels



was, "On earth peace!" What wonder that St. Paul should write of the Incarnate Son of God, the Babe of Bethlehem, "He is our peace" (Eph. ii. 14).

II. But the Infant Jesus has not only brought us peace with God, but peace with ourselves. "To be reconciled to thee," says St. Bernard, "is to be reconciled to myself." What is it that disturbs our peace? This question would be answered in a variety of ways. Some would say suffering—weary days and sleepless nights of sickness. Others would say sorrow: the aching void brought about by the death of some one dear, the pain of loss, the empty chair, the departed presence which brought light and joy to us. Others, again, would answer, misfortune: the frown of the world, depression of trade, loss of occupation, money failure, the change from affluence to poverty, from easy circumstances to want. Others would reply that the unkindness of others breaks peace: the harsh word, the being misunderstood, the stab of detraction or calumny behind our backs, the ingratitude we so frequently experience. All these are, I know, my dear brethren, most grievous and most trying, but they do not destroy peace. The surface of the sea is often upturned and ruffled by the storm. "The floods have lifted up their voice; the floods have lifted up their waves with the noise of many waters." But deep down in the ocean bed there is a calm, unstirred and unmoved by the tumult above. And so it is with ourselves. The storms of life may ruffle the surface of our being—they may fret us and disturb us sorely—they may furrow our brow, and whiten our hair, but deep down in our hearts there should be, "the peace of God which surpasseth all understanding" (Philippians iv. 7). Every man's peace begins at home. No outward circumstance can give it to us, or rob us of it. It is to be found in that citadel which He who is the Prince of Peace comes to establish in our hearts. What is it that disturbs our peace? Only one thing: sin. "The wicked are like the raging sea which can-

not rest, and the waves thereof cast up dirt and mire. There is no peace to the wicked, saith the Lord God." (Isaias lvii. 20, 21).

The man who lives in unrepented mortal sin must always, if he have the faith, be a restless, unhappy, and dissatisfied man. He may stifle his conscience with pleasure, or drug it with wine and strong drink, but in his better moments the thought of God and of judgment to come will assert itself. "Shall I not visit for these things, saith the Lord" (Jeremias v. 9). The sudden death of a friend, an accident near home, will make him pause and tremble. Lord, if it had been myself! A narrow escape, a sudden and unexpected illness, a heavy sorrow will make him pause for an instant in his mad career. Like our first parents, he hears "the voice of the Lord God" calling to him, "How many are my iniquities and sins?" (Job. xiii. 23). In hideous array they draw themselves up in order before him, and he shakes with fear. Like Damocles, we read of in pagan history, he seems to see the sword hanging over his head by a single horse-hair. How can such a one be at peace?

But yet the Babe of Bethlehem came as the bearer of peace to him. The angels did not exclude him from their Christmas song in the night. How is he to be partaker of it? To enjoy this peace, we must, as the Church prays at Benediction, "feel within ourselves the fruit of His Redemption." "God indeed was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing to them their sins" (2 Cor. v. 19). "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins" (1 St. John i. 9). With the words of absolution, back comes the grace of God to the heart, and with sanctifying grace and peace, gently stealing into the soul like the fragrance of violets or the sweet odour of incense, imperceptibly but yet most really. "A conscience without offence towards God and towards men" (Acts xxiv. 16). A soul free from stain of mortal sin, a soul in which no deliberate venial sin finds a "home and a resting-place," is, indeed, the soul at peace with God. My brethren, see

“that you receive not the grace of God in vain.” Once pardoned and absolved, let us treasure the gift of grace within our hearts. While that is there, we may laugh at the storms that are without. “The work of justice shall be peace, and the service of justice quietness and security for ever” (Isaias xxxii. 17). “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you, not as the world giveth do I give to you” (St. John xiv. 17). O sweetest Infant Jesus, true peacemaker, help us to keep Thy peace in our souls. *Agnus Dei, Qui tollis peccata mundi, dona nobis pacem.*

III. But the peace which the Incarnate Son of God brings to the world extends yet further—not only does He make peace between God and man and between man and his conscience, but also between man and man. “On earth, peace to men.”

The moment chosen by God for the birth of Him who was to be the Messenger of peace, was, humanly speaking, the happiest imaginable. It was in the 40th year of the Emperor Augustus, when, after long ages of war, the empire enjoyed, for the first time, a period of rest and tranquillity. Almost the whole known world was in subjection to the Roman sway. In God’s providence what moment could have been more propitious for uniting all into one family, of which Jesus Christ was to be Head, one Fold of which He was to be the Shepherd?

Peace between man and man! To realize the change brought about over the face of society by the birth of our Lord and the Christian morality, we need to understand in measure the law which at that time governed man’s relationship to his fellow-man. It was a law of hate—for the poor, the sick, the children, there was absolutely no provision. The poor were deemed unclean beasts to be neglected and insulted. One emperor caused a ship-load of them to be taken out to sea and sunk. As regards the sick, it is an appalling fact, that there is no allusion to any charitable institution in the whole of pagan literature. And the children, they might be murdered at the moment of

birth, or exposed or sold. In many parts they were sacrificed to the abominable rites of pagan worship. And womanhood was degraded. The maiden was the slave of her father, who might sell her or might slay her. Sold in marriage to the highest bidder, she became not his companion and his helper, but his slave and his chattel. Happy, indeed, if at length she did not find herself deserted and abandoned, in a country where polygamy and divorce were sanctioned by the authority of the law. This was ordinary married life in pagan Rome. This was the state of pagan society at the time of the birth of the Prince of Peace. Who would have thought that the little Child who lay in the manger would thus have revolutionised the world? In this is His teaching summed up. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole mind, and thy neighbour as thyself" (St. Matt. xxii. 37). "If any man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar. For he that loveth not his brother whom he seeth, how can he love God whom he seeth not?" (1 St. John iv. 20). And does any man ask "Who is my neighbour?" Christ answers by the parable of the good Samaritan, the upshot of which is, all to whom we can do a neighbour's part. The law of Christ goes further still in charity to our neighbour. We must not only love him as ourself, we must even love our enemies. "I say to you love your enemies: do good to them that hate you: and pray for them that persecute and calumniate you: that you may be the children of your Father who is in heaven" (St. Matt. v. 44). Contrast, then, the teaching of the Saviour with the practice of pagan Rome. Now the poor are the subject of a Beatitude. "Blessed are ye poor: for yours is the kingdom of God" (St. Luke vi. 20). "Hath not God chosen the poor in this world, rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which God hath promised to them that love Him" (St. James ii. 5). Charity to the poor was to be the test of our love towards God. "He that hath the substance of this world, and shall see his brother in need, and shall shut up his bowels from him;



how doth the charity of God abide in him" (1 St. John iii. 17)? To visit the sick becomes an act of mercy done to Christ Himself. "Sick and you visited me" (St. Matt. xxv 36). "As long as you did it to one of these, my least brethren, you did it to me." Children are the special care of the Sacred Heart. "Suffer the little children, and forbid them not to come unto me: for the kingdom of heaven is for such" (St. Matt. xix. 14). "Whosoever shall scandalize one of these little ones, that believe in me: it were better for him that a mill-stone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the sea" (St. Mark ix. 41). And once more, in Mary the Mother of God, womanhood is elevated, and dignified, and ennobled. In the New Law Marriage is raised to the dignity of a Sacrament. "For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife, and they shall be two in one flesh. This is a great Sacrament; but I speak in Christ and in the Church" (Ephesians v. 32). Again, marriage is indissoluble. Divorce has no place in the Gospel scheme. "Therefore, now, they are not two, but one flesh. What, therefore, God hath joined together, let no man put asunder" (St. Matt. xix. 6).

Well, then, might the angel call his message to the shepherds "tidings of great joy to all the people." Well might angel choirs take up the strain, and, gazing at the birth-scene in the cave of Bethlehem, exclaim, "Glory to God in the highest: and on earth peace."

When we have studied in detail the state of the pagan world—when we have realized the miseries to which childhood and womanhood, the sick and the poor, were subjected—when we contrast their position then with their position now, we understand in measure the greatness of the blessings of Christianity. It is the Babe of Bethlehem who has wrought the change. Should not our hearts, then, be full of joy, and our lips of praise? "*Landamus te, benedicimus te, adoramus te, glorificamus te.*" We praise thee; we bless thee; we adore thee; we glorify thee.

My dear brethren, we look round the world, and we

see numbers of men and women who are strangers to this peace of Christ. They are neither at peace with God, with themselves, nor with their fellows. How is it? The sweet Child of Bethlehem speaks of peace, but they answer by strife. "With them that hated peace I was peaceable: when I spoke to them, they fought against me without a cause" (Ps. cxix. 7). The truth is this, certain conditions are annexed to it on our part. For man to accept the peace of Christ, good will and co-operation are needful. "On earth peace to men of good will." Peace, not to science, or learning, or knowledge, but to good will. "As many as received Him He gave them power to be made the sons of God, to them that believe in His name" (St. John i. 1, 2). This peace was offered to Pharisee and Sadducee alike, but they rejected it. It was offered to Herod, in his glittering court; but the birth of the Prince of Peace brought him nought but anxiety and disquiet, for he feared a rival to an earthly crown. It was offered to these and rejected. But who accepted it? The shepherds—honest, simple souls, acting up to their light, serving God in their daily life, willing to correspond with every inspiration of grace. The wise men, who, in spite of many obstacles and much discouragement—in spite of a long and weary journey, and the jeers of friends and acquaintances—sought that peace and knelt before the humble Infant in His crib, as though He were girt about with all the emblems of royalty. The apostles, who, when the Child had become a man, with a good heart left all things to follow Him. And not only these. Every soul which possesses a good will—well-intentioned, conformable to the will of Almighty God, and subject to His Divine law—is partaker of the peace of Christ. God asks not the service of slaves. He will not have unwilling servants. He forces no man. Our wills are free for good; they are equally free for evil. It is a good or bad will which makes or mars our salvation.

My dear brethren, the little Infant stretches out His tiny arms from the manger, this Christmas season, with

the renewed offer of peace. Can you look at Him, in His Baby attractiveness, and still remain hard of heart? Are you among the many who passed the crib and knew not the mystery that was enacted there? Who, seriously, could be so mad as to prefer a state of enmity with God to the peace which the Incarnation has accomplished? Who would throw over his title-deeds to His sonship and to the inheritance in store for him? Who would prefer a soul laden with guilt to the calm of sin forgiven, when the Holy Child is even now uplifting His hand in absolution? Who would choose enmity and strife with his fellow-man, with all the miseries that surround it—jealousies, hates, crime—when the Christmas message is—"On earth, peace to men"?

Full many a Christian heart at this season is stored with the peace of Christmas. Many a one has received, under the Sacramental species, Jesus who for us was born of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Treasure this peace—be misers of it. In the midst of Christmas joy and revel let not the Evil One step in to mar or to rob us of it, but let us cherish, in the brightness of social life and Christmas kindness, and Christmas hospitality, the remembrance that all this is the outcome of joy at the Incarnation. Let nothing in excess disturb the peace accorded us by the Divine Child, "who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven, and was Incarnate."

This peace abides in child-like hearts. "Unless you be converted, and become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven" (St. Matt. xviii. 3). The heart of the child is innocent, the heart of the child is humble, the heart of the child is obedient. "Learn of me, because I am meek and humble of heart, and you shall find rest to your souls" (St. Matt. xi. 29). Fence the peace you have found with purity, humility, and obedience, and it shall abide with you always, as a foretaste of the peace which is eternal.

# Catholic Sermons

BY REV. J. B. BAGSHAWE.

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## SERMON XLII.

### *The New Year.*

"Thou art the self-same, and Thy years shall not fail" (Heb. i. 12).

THESE words, my dear brethren, have, for us, to-day, a special significance. We have come to the end of one year, and are just entering upon another. All the joys and sorrows of the past year have disappeared, and the bells that announce a New Year remind us powerfully of the passage of time.

Our lives are gliding away from us like the smooth, swift current of a river: the rapidity of the stream is not noticed until something comes to obstruct its course, and then the ripple of the water shows how fast it is going. In the same way our lives pass, and it is such celebrations as the New Year which bring to our remembrance the rapid progress of time.

On such occasions we cannot but think of the infinite greatness of Almighty God, and the immense distance which separates Him from His creation. Whilst we, and all creatures with us, are hurrying on in this rapid course of time—growing old, and changing every moment, He is "our Father from eternity to eternity" (1 Par. xxix. 10). "With whom there is no change nor shadow of alteration" (St. James i. 17). This earth, and the universe around us, have existed for long ages—in comparison with which the duration of the life of man is but a moment, and yet the earth and all things are, like ourselves, only running their appointed course and growing old. "The Lord God Almighty is, and was, and is to come" (Ap. xi. 17).

"Thou in the beginning, O Lord, didst found the earth; and the works of Thy hands are the heavens. They shall perish, but Thou shalt continue, and they shall grow old



as a garment : and as a vesture shalt Thou change them, and they shall be changed ; but Thou art the self-same, and Thy years shall not fail ” (Heb. i. 10). God is infinite and eternal, unmovable and unchangeable ; He is “ patient because He is eternal,” and “ one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day ” (2 St. Peter iii. 8). “ He is the living and eternal God for ever ; and His kingdom shall not be destroyed, and His power shall be for ever ” (Dan. vi. 26). What an awful contrast does this Being of God present to the perpetual hurry and change of human life—to our failing years and speedy growing old !

Such thoughts as these, my dear brethren, ought to fill our minds as we celebrate the beginning of the New Year which God has given us. We should pause for a moment on the brink of this new period of time into which, if we may say so, we are plunging, to thank God for the years He has bestowed upon us, and, moreover, to look back over our past lives, and forwards to the time to come. A traveller, when he reaches a resting-place in his journey, pauses to look back over the road he has travelled—to think how far he has got on his way, and of the path that lies hidden before him which he must traverse before he comes to his journey’s end. Such days as the present ought to make even the most careless amongst us think a little of the past and of the future.

We have passed over a certain portion of our lives : over the greatest part of them it may be, and the time has gone and slipped away out of our hands for ever for good or for evil. We shall certainly have to account for it all, but we can change nothing : we must face the past such as it is. In a few years we shall come to a day when the whole of our lives will be to us, as is now the year 1881, a confused memory of past events, of thoughts, and of words, which seem to have gone by almost in a moment—which appear to be imperfect, and to have been interrupted in the middle, and yet which are absolutely finished and unchangeable. Is this all that my life was to produce ? Is this the end of all my plans and aspirations ? “ Whilst I was yet but beginning He cut

me off" (Isaias xxxviii. 12). How far have we come on our journey? How much remains for us still? Can we be reasonably well satisfied with the progress we are making towards our journey's end? These are the questions which everyone, who thinks at all, will naturally ask himself on such a day as that of the New Year.

Our first thought, however, ought to be one of thankfulness to Almighty God. A year of our lives has passed, and we must not forget that it was God's gift, and was filled with the good things for body and soul which God granted to us. How many pleasures have been allowed to us in the course of it, and how many pains have been spared us? The enjoyments of the past year are all gone now, but they were very pleasant whilst they lasted, and perhaps they did their work very well—that is, they enabled us to persevere, and to go through what might have been too great a burden for our strength if God's Providence had not lightened it as it did. How many dangers have we avoided in the course of the year in which we might have perished? "A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand: but it shall not come nigh to thee" (Ps. xc. 7). Has it not been so with us—and should we not now thank God? We know of many dangers that have been near us—but how many more have there been of which we had no idea?

God's good Providence, then, has kept us out of many perils, and, we may most of us add, has supported us in many trials and pains, and has at last brought us safely to the beginning of a New Year. Surely our first thought ought to be to thank Him. We can do nothing else; we have no other return in our power—the least we can do is to love and to thank Him who has been so gracious and tender towards us.

The temporal goods and blessings we have received are, however, of little real value in comparison with the spiritual advantages and means of progress which have been bestowed on us. We have to thank God for all the good we have done, which, we know very well, has all been done by His Grace. It may be very little, but, whatever it is that we have done or suffered for God in

the past year, "shall not lose its reward." Some day, perhaps, little things which we have long forgotten, and which were but trifles in themselves, will appear and speak powerfully in our behalf. Of good deeds as well as of evil ones, God says: "Are not these things stored up with me, and sealed up in my treasures?" (Deut. xxxii. 34).

We have, then, to thank our Lord for all the treasures which His grace has enabled us to lay up for ourselves, since, without Him, we could have done nothing. But how much more we might have done! How fruitful in good works might this past year have been made, if we had only been zealous in good works, and striven hard to make use of the time and grace bestowed on us! We should be grateful not only for the good actually done, but for all the *opportunities* of good which have been given to us—even if we are conscious that we have not used these opportunities as we might have done. The year has been full of the means of grace. What copious fountains of grace have been placed before us during the year! "They shall not hunger nor thirst, neither shall the heat nor the sun strike them: for He that is merciful shall be their shepherd, and at the fountains of water He shall give them drink" (Isaias xlix. 10). These words have been spiritually fulfilled in our case.

Has not our Lord again and again honoured and enriched us all by the Sacraments His love has provided? Would He not, moreover, have done so much more abundantly, if only we had faithfully listened to His calls? Has He not, besides, shown great compassion for our weakness, and kept us out of temptation? Which of us would have been able to stand if the Lord had not "made, with temptation, issue that you might be able to bear it" (1 Cor. x. 13). If we had been tempted as grievously as some of the worst of those around us, perhaps we might have fallen as badly as any of them. When we come to the end of the year therefore safe in body and soul, the least we can do is to praise and glorify our Father in heaven, by whom all good has been given, and all evil and danger warded off.

Our gratitude should, however, be largely mixed up

with a feeling of regret for the faults and imperfections of which we have been guilty. If we could only see before us the sins of this past year—not in the vague way in which we now remember them—not with all the palliations and excuses with which our own self-love covers them, but as we certainly shall see them one day, complete in their number and their weight, with all those circumstances which have aggravated the guilt of them: if we could see the past year in this way, we should most of us feel that we had plenty of ground for sufficient sorrow and self-reproach. Have we not, perhaps, tried God's patience and forbearance to the utmost? If we think of all the deliberate, reiterated sins of which most of us have been guilty—of the way in which we have resisted God's grace, and, perhaps, fallen back, again and again, into the same sins, we shall be inclined to remember our Lord's words to the Jews: "How long shall I be with you?" "How long shall I suffer you?" (St. Mark ix. 18). And to think that we have given Him great reason to use the same words about us. In the Old Law Almighty God said of the Jews: "Forty years was I offended with that generation, and I said: these always err in heart" (Ps. xlix. 10). Have we not gone on "erring in heart" as the Jews did? have we not, perhaps, been for "forty years" offensive to Him, as they were—and yet He has suffered us. It may be that we have done much evil in the past, and have lost many opportunities of good: it may be that, by our sins, we have contracted debts to the justice of God, which we shall have one day to pay, but, after all, we have been brought safely to the year's end, and still have before us a future which can do so much to remedy the evil. Our thoughts ought, therefore, to be chiefly directed forwards, to the time to come.

We must not forget the past year, because we owe a debt both of thankfulness and of sorrow; but our great idea, the special feeling of this day, should be one of hopeful anticipation and good resolution. We should all be full of the thought, how we can best spend the New Year that God has given us: "One thing I do, forget-



ting the things that are behind, and stretching forth myself to those that are before, I press forwards the mark, to the prize of the supernal vocation of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. iii. 13). These words of the apostle, my dear brethren, are words which we may well take as our motto for the New Year which we are about to begin. When we look forward into the future, we are like the traveller who looks out from the hill-top over a strange and new country that lies before him : he can see his road but a few steps in advance, and then all is concealed from his sight, and he knows not which way it will turn. We cannot tell what this year will bring us. Will it be good or bad ? Bring joy or sorrow ? Will it be the critical and turning-point of our lives ? or will it, perhaps, be the last year that God will be pleased to allow us. It may be that this very coming year is the year of our death, and that 1882 is the date to be written on our tombs : nay, we are certain that it will be inscribed on the graves of many of us—yours or mine. What is coming we cannot tell—we are going out into the darkness, and must simply accept all that God's Providence may design for us.

The New Year, however, seems to come to us a pledge for the future, and as a promise of God's grace and favour. Why has He had patience with us so long, and brought us safe to welcome once more the New Year ?—*not*, we fondly hope, that we may fill up the measure of our iniquities, but as a crowning mercy, to complete all the favours which we have received.

How much can be done in this one year, even if it should be the last of our lives ? There is scarcely any limits to its possibilities. Our Master has given to the time that remains for us—be it long or short—the wondrous power of making up for all that has gone before. As He tells us in the parable, the last hour which remains, even when the work seems well nigh done, may be so employed as to make us equal to those "who have borne the burden of the day and the heat," so that no one should be able to say that it was too late to begin.

"See therefore, brethren, how you walk circumspectly,

not as unwise, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil" (Eph. v. 15).

The New Year, then, has been given to us that we may redeem the past and make up for what has been badly spent. It is an inestimable treasure for all who know how to use it. To the young, how valuable a possession is the future that lies stretched out before them, full of promise, full of hope! What may they not do with all the time that is given them!—with all the vigour and freshness of youth which is theirs? How joyous and precious to them are the years of life! And to the old, is it not even more precious? If but a little remains to them, and that little seems slipping from them very fast, it has become for that very reason more precious. It is the autumn, the time for gathering in the harvest, when they have to make the most of all the summer's toil and pain. The harvest took the long toil of the spring and the summer to plant and to mature; but a few days of the autumn are sufficient to gather in all the fruits: and so it is in our lives. But those who are gathering in the harvest must work hard, because the winter is at hand, and the light is failing, and "the night cometh when no man can work" (St. John ix. 4).

All men may welcome the New Year with thankfulness: if we have been trying to lead good lives and to serve God, we may think that a part of our dangerous course is over, and that every little good deed we have done, and every pain and self-denial we have suffered in the service of God, will be amply considered. All these things will be valued by a kind and indulgent Master, not for their own sake, but for the Precious Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ: and for every such deed there is laid up for us a reward of grace in this life, and of glory to come. We must think, moreover, that God's grace, which has led us so far in safety, will certainly not abandon us, but will enable us to persevere to the end. Those who have been careless and done nothing as yet, should thank God still more for the future, of which this New Year is a sign and a pledge. It may be—for them—that one last special season of grace which has been given to

make amends for all that has gone before. "Behold for these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig-tree, and I find none. Cut it down: why cumbereth it the ground? But he answering, said to him, Lord, let it alone this year also, until I dig about it and dung it: and if haply it bear fruit: but if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down" (St. Luke xiii. 7).

What have we ourselves done? May it not be said of us: "why cumbereth it the ground?"

Each one then, in his own heart, has abundant reason for thanking God for this New Year given to us, and may well consider it as given by God's special mercy to enable him to accomplish his salvation. Such, Christians, are some of the thoughts you should have for a New Year; but the good the year brings us will depend on the use we make of it: it is a gift for good or for evil, as it may be employed. We all have a vague idea that the future will do something wonderful for us—that some day we shall find it much easier to be good—that later on in life we shall have no difficulty in being better Christians than we now are. The future comes and goes, and finds us much the same: how many "future years" can we remember that are now long past, and how little we did in them when they came! It is a great delusion trusting to the future, if we do not set to work in earnest. We should, therefore, begin the year with good resolutions—not resolutions as to what we will do at some distant day, but resolutions which we can try, at least, to put in practice at once. "And I said, Now have I begun: this is the change of the right hand of the Most High" (Ps. lxxvi. 11). All real resolutions should be, like this of the Psalmist, to begin *now*—not at some future time.

We are apt to be weary of good resolutions, and to think how many we have made, and how easily we have broken them. Let us not lose courage. Life is a warfare, and, through a number of partial defeats, we shall march on to victory, if only we persevere. Every real good resolution which we form, and every effort we make to put it in practice, is at least something done—it is at least one blow directed against the enemy. We begin

the year with the invocation of the Holy Spirit, and this must remind us of the first essential for success—that we are to trust in all we do to the guiding grace of God, and not to rely upon our own strength. We beg the Spirit of God to “fill our hearts” and to “kindle in them the fire of His love.” With this fire once burning within us, all things will be easy; with His help we could accomplish much more difficult things than will ever be asked of us.

The first day of the New Year is the Feast of the Circumcision. Our Lord presents Himself to us on this day, as He does at Christmas, as our tender, loving Infant Saviour; but it is not with the joy of Christmas. On this day He would begin His lessons to us, and He teaches us by suffering. He shed His blood for the first time in order to show us how completely He had identified Himself with that sinful race which He came down on earth to save. He would begin His life as the sons of men do—in wailing, tears, and suffering; He would take upon Himself the mark of a sinner, and all the obligations and burdens of sin. He was circumcised in obedience to the law laid upon His people, and by that very act He undertook to be obedient in all things, and received upon His shoulders the whole burden of the law. St. Paul tells us that he who is circumcised is “a debtor to the whole law” (Gal. v. 3), and, by His own will, Jesus took that burden on Himself.

Pause for a moment, my dear brethren, and think how heavy was the burden which our Infant Saviour willingly and knowingly took upon Himself on this first day of the year, when He chose to be called by His sweet name of Jesus! He took upon Himself the sins of men, which are represented by the whole ceremonial of the Mosaic Law, with its obligations and sacrifices. He undertook also to bear the punishments of sin—the labours, pains, and vexations of human life on earth—its inevitable weariness and suffering—and, at last, the death, which is its appropriate termination.

In this first shedding of His blood our Lord foresaw and accepted all the ignominy and pain which He was to



undergo. He had before Him the ingratitude and rejection of His own people—the abandonment and desolation of His Passion, and its end in the ignominy and torment of the cross.

Our Lord puts before us the picture of Himself, on this first day of a New Year, that we may have a good will and a good heart to undertake the burdens of the time to come, and, as the apostle says, to “run by patience to the fight proposed to us, looking on Jesus—the author and finisher of faith—who, having joy set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and now sitteth on the right hand of the throne of God. For think diligently on Him that endured such opposition from sinners against Himself, that you be not wearied, fainting in your minds—for you have not yet resisted unto blood striving against sin” (Heb. xii. 1).

If you would make this year profitable to your salvation, and turn its days into gold, you must accept in your hearts the example which our Lord gives us; you must take upon you the yoke as He did. He does not ask you to bear a hard and heavy burden, such as He Himself bore, for He says: “Take up my yoke upon you, and learn of me, because I am meek and humble of heart: and you shall find rest to your souls, for my yoke is sweet and my burden light” (St. Matt. xi. 29). Our Lord’s yoke is sweet and light, and is one which brings rest to the souls of those who bear it; and still, after all, it is a yoke, and therefore our first duty is to take up this yoke cheerfully and lovingly, and bear it faithfully.

Men sometimes complain of the law of God, and find it hard and wearisome. Is not this because they have never realized that it is, and was intended to be, a yoke; and, accordingly, they have never accepted this yoke in earnest, or bowed their necks to it? If this is the way in which they pretend to follow Christ, it is not to be wondered at if they find His Commandments hard. Those who take up the yoke of obedience willingly, and endeavour heartily to carry out God’s Commandments, may say, with the Psalmist: “The judgments of the Lord

are true, justified in themselves—more to be desired than gold and many precious stones, and sweeter than honey and the honeycomb, for thy servant keepeth them, and in keeping them there is a great reward” (Ps. xviii. 10).

To come to a practical conclusion, let us consider a little more in detail what are the good resolutions which we are to make at the beginning of the year. If this year is to be your last, what would you wish to have done in it? The first thing clearly is to be diligent and punctual in all the outward duties of religion. Duties of this kind are a sort of framework, on which all real and trustworthy interior feelings rest. What we do externally is the great test of obedience and of charity. “If you love me, keep my commandments.” These external duties of religion are regulated by the laws of the Church, inasmuch as Christ has left it to His Church to regulate the details of His service. We have, then, to take up Christ’s yoke, in the first place, by loyally and diligently carrying out the duties imposed on us by the Church in God’s name. This is sometimes a hard thing to do. The mere fact that commands come to us through the medium of other men is very often a great trial of obedience.

The two great things asked of us are—diligence in going to the Sacraments, and care in sanctifying Sunday. It is hardly too much to say that you would certainly make the coming year a time of blessing if you would only attend to these points. If you would go to Confession and Communion, not just when you pleased, but at such regular intervals as were suited to your condition of life, and, at the same time, made every Sunday a day of real piety and devotion, I do not think God would ever let you go far astray. If you look back to past irregularities, you will generally find that they depend on neglect of the Sacraments, and coldness and carelessness in your duty on Sundays. It is not a great thing to promise our Lord diligence in these two points.

The object of all external things in religion is to help you to pray, and to co-operate with your prayers, and, if you are to make external devotion profitable, it must be

by the spirit of prayer. "Let nothing hinder thee from praying always, and be not afraid to be justified even to death; for the reward of God continueth for ever" (Eccles. xviii. 22). It is the spirit of prayer which is the great characteristic of good Christians, and this spirit depends upon and keeps us, in a sense, in the presence of God. "In Him we live and move, and have our being" (Acts xvii. 28); and yet it is very easy to have our hearts for Him. My brethren, if you would make this year a blessed time, enter daily into the great and all-holy presence of God; do not be contented with mere forms of words, but "enter into thy chamber, and, having shut the door, pray to thy Father in secret" (St. Matt. vi. 6). Shut the door of your heart against all outward things, and do not be contented till you feel that you are face to face with your Creator in prayer. If you will do this at least once a day, when the work of daily life is done, you will find strength to overcome all temptation. Is it a difficult thing to ask? Is it not the greatest of Christian privileges to be allowed thus to speak to his Creator?

We are beginning this year, my dear brethren, in company with the Infant Jesus and His Blessed Mother, and He calls us, as it were, to enter into His family, and to work and suffer with Him, and then He promises us His reward. In all the work we may have to do, let us remember the Holy House of Nazareth, and how our Lord toiled and laboured for us. He did not disdain to bear the burden of the day and the heats, that He might encourage us to share our labours with Him. No matter how hard or how uninviting may be the work to which you are called, or how great the trials you may have to bear, you may make them all sweet and easy, if you will only think that you are doing them for and with our Lord. "All whatsoever you do in word or in work, all things do ye in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ" (Colos. iii. 17).

# Catholic Sermons

BY REV. J. B. BAGSHAW.

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## SERMON XLIII.

### *The Epiphany.*

“For a child is born to us, and a son is given to us, and the government is upon His shoulder ; and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, God the Mighty, the Father of the world to come, the Prince of Peace” (Isaiah ix. 6).

ON this day of the Epiphany, my dear brethren, our Lord presents Himself to us as “Wonderful, Counsellor, God the Mighty, the Father of the world to come, the Prince of Peace.” On Christmas day He seems to hide His glory and dignity. He would be simply the “Child born to us, the Son given to us,” who has come down on earth to share our poverty, and to take upon Himself the burden of our mortality ; but the Epiphany is His “manifestation,” and He calls upon heaven and earth to recognize Him as the “Ruler who is to rule His people.”

He is still in the poor stable of Bethlehem, and His court consists of His Blessed Mother and St. Joseph ; but the star has appeared in the East and brings His subjects from afar to pay Him homage.

All heaven and earth owned Him as Lord. To use the words of St. Gregory : “All things which He had made bore witness that their Maker was come. Let me reckon them after the manner of men. The heavens knew that He was God, and sent a star to shine over where He lay. The sea knew it, and bore Him up when He walked upon it. The earth knew it, and quaked when He died. The sun knew it, and was darkened. The rocks and walls knew it, and rent at the hour of His death. Hell knew it, and gave up the dead that were in it. And yet, up to this very hour, the hearts of unbelieving Jews will not acknowledge that He to whom all nature testified is their God, and, more hardened than the rocks, refuse to be rent by repentance.”

The wise men come from the East, saying : “Where is



He that is born King of the Jews ? for we have seen His star in the East, and are come to adore Him. And King Herod, hearing this, was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him ; and by their very trouble they own the power of that new-born King who is manifested to them.

Let us go with the wise men to acknowledge and adore our new-born Lord : "Entering into the house, they found the Child with Mary His Mother ; and falling down they adored Him." To the eyes of men He appears the weakest and most helpless of all creatures, and yet "the government is upon His shoulder," and in His hand is the sceptre with which "to execute judgment and justice in the earth" (Jer. xxiii. 5), for "the Lord is a great God, and a great King above all gods" (Ps. xciv. 3) ; and "He hath on His garment, and on His thigh, written King of kings and Lord of lords" (Ap. xix. 16). It is this Child who is King of kings : it is He of whom it is written : "I will give thee the Gentiles for thy inheritance, and the uttermost paths of the earth for thy possession. Thou shalt rule them with a rod of iron, and shalt break them in pieces like a potter's vessel" (Ps. ii. 8).

The special devotion of the day, my dear brethren, is to own the divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ hidden by His human nature, and lovingly to acknowledge the royalty and empire which are concealed by the humility of the stable of Bethlehem. He lies before us, God and man : as God, the "ancient of days," who is from "eternity to eternity ;" and, as man, the youngest born of all creation. As God the Almighty, "by whose ordinance the day goes on, for all things serve Him ;" as man, the weakest and most dependant of all creatures. How must the angels have adored and wondered at the ways of God when first they came to pay their homage to their new-born Lord : "This is the work of the Lord, and it is wonderful in our eyes" (Ps. cxvii. 23).

The Epiphany is the manifestation of our Lord's universal dominion, and as such is the feast of the Catholicity of the Church. Up till this time a universal Church had been a thing unknown in the world. The special revelations of God had been given to one people, and

His covenant had been made with them alone. The prophets had been sent by God to one nation: they had been "sent to the house of Israel," and no one had appeared who had a claim to a wider authority. The law and the prophets, indeed, had in them the promise of something greater—they were for a time only, and to bear witness to the coming of a wider kingdom—but their commission was to one family, and the law they taught was strictly a national religion. It was essentially mixed up with the temporal government, with the habits and usages of one race of men, and adapted to one country only, and it clearly was never intended for the whole world.

Nothing could be more plainly national than the Jewish Church. The sacrifices must all be offered up to God in the temple of Jerusalem, and the Jewish people were commanded to go up to Jerusalem on the great feasts every year. The priesthood was hereditary in one family, so that no one who was not of the house of Aaron could minister at God's altar, and every detail of the ceremonial was clearly ordered for one people exclusively. But this was only a period of preparation, and the time was to come when the Church of God was to be universal, and to belong to all the world. "The hour cometh when you shall neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem adore the Father" (St. John iv. 21). But "from the rising of the sun to the going down, my name is great among the Gentiles" (Mal. i. 11).

Our Lord came, not as the prophets had done, with a mission to one country and people, but for all the sons of men, and accordingly He was to found a religion which was to be spread throughout the world, and to belong to all the world alike. He was to break down that wall of separation which had hitherto divided the Church of God on earth from the rest of the world, and in the feast which we are celebrating He strikes the first blow.

He sent His angels to summon His chosen people of the Jews, and they came to Bethlehem to "see this word which has come to pass, which the Lord had shown them," and "they came in haste and found Mary and Joseph

and the Infant lying in the manger" (St. Luke ii. 16). But the Gentiles, also, must have their Christmas day, and the star brings them to Jerusalem, on the Epiphany—"and behold the star, which they had seen in the East, went before them, until it came and stood over where the Child was. And seeing the star they rejoiced with exceeding great joy: and entering in they found the Child with Mary His Mother: and falling down they adored Him: and opening their treasures they offered Him gifts—gold, frankincense and myrrh" (St. Mat. ii. 9). All the nations of the world—Jews and Gentiles—were invited to come by their representatives to pay their homage at Bethlehem, and they all came on equal terms, to show that now there was to be no longer any division on account of race or country, but that the new-born King had come as the common Saviour of the whole human race, and was to establish a Church which should embrace them all.

These wise men who came from the East represented all the nations of the world that were not of the chosen people of the Jews; and went as a solemn embassy to welcome the Saviour of men, on behalf of all the races of mankind. They went in the name of Romans and Greeks, Orientals and barbarians—of all the people then existing upon earth—to offer homage and loyalty to "Him who was born King of the Jews," and not only of the Jews, but of all mankind. We, too, were represented in this solemn embassy, and the gold, frankincense and myrrh, which were offered to the Infant Jesus, were the token of the loyalty, love, and worship which were promised in our name.

The call of the Gentiles to Bethlehem at our Lord's nativity was the first step towards the abolition of the exclusive national privileges of the Jews; the last step was when "the veil of the temple was rent in two from the top even to the bottom" (St. Matt. xxvii. 51), when Jesus died upon the cross. The Holy of Holies, which had been so carefully hidden from the eyes of men, that no one but the high priest could enter therein, was now laid open to the gaze of all mankind, and the knowledge

and worship of the true God—which had been, to a great extent, hidden and confined to one nation—had become the common property of all mankind.

Our Lord sent His apostles, not as the prophets had been sent, to a single nation, but to all mankind. “All power is given to me in heaven and on earth; going, therefore, teach ye all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and behold I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world” (St. Mat. xxviii. 18). “Go ye into the whole world, and preach the Gospel to every creature” (St. Mark xvi. 15). What possible commission could have been wider?—what words could have more fully expressed the total abolition of all local or national distinctions?

The universality of the Church was most beautifully shadowed forth on the great day when our Lord formally sent it forth into the world by the coming down of His Holy Spirit. “Now there were at Jerusalem Jews, devout men out of every nation under heaven, and they were all amazed and wondered, saying, Behold, are not all these that speak Galileans, and have we not heard every man our own tongue wherein we were born?” (Acts ii. 8). This was to be the characteristic of our Lord’s Church upon earth—that it should belong to no one language, but should know how to speak to every man alike “as the tongue wherein he is born.” All distinctions of race or nationality were to be abolished in the Church, so that there should be “neither Gentile nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, barbarian nor Scythian, bond nor free, but Christ all in all” (Colos. iii. 11).

From this time forth there could be no such thing as a National Church, since Catholicity was to be the mark of a Divine institution, and any community which declared itself to be National, was, by that very fact, cut off from all claim to be considered as the Church of God.

Yet, with all this wide extension throughout the world, there was to be but one Church, as conspicuous for its



unity as for its Catholicity. The Jews and the Gentiles were led to the one same house of the Lord, where they found Mary and Joseph, and the Infant lying in the manger, and were admitted to the fellowship of the same Holy Family. The house of the Lord was to be the abode of peace, wherein all the divisions that separate men outside should be hushed; there was, our Lord Himself tells us, to be "one fold and one Shepherd" (St. John x. 16). St. Paul says: "One body and one Spirit, as you are called in one hope of your calling. One Lord, one faith, one baptism . . . that henceforth we be no more children tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine by the wickedness of men" (Eph. iv. 4—14).

To establish such a Church was, indeed, a work for none less than a Divine Founder. Thus, to combine unity of faith with an extension throughout the whole world, is something far beyond the power of man, and this is the special glory of the Catholic Church. We must rejoice, then, with the Holy Church—with "that Jerusalem which is above, which is our mother" (Gal. iv. 24). Let us join heartily in the words of the prophet which are read on this day: "Arise, be enlightened, O Jerusalem, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee. For behold darkness shall cover the earth and a mist the people; but the Lord shall arise upon thee, and His glory shall be seen upon thee. And the Gentiles shall walk in thy light, and kings in the brightness of thy rising. Lift up thy eyes round about and see: all these are gathered together, they are come to thee: thy sons shall come from afar, and thy daughters shall rise up at thy side. Then shalt thou see and abound, and thy heart shall wonder and be enlarged, when the multitude of the sea shall be converted to thee, the strength of the Gentiles shall come to thee. The multitude of camels shall cover thee, the dromedaries of Madian and Ephraim: all they from Saba shall come, bringing gold and frankincense, and showing forth praise to the Lord" (Isaias lx. 1).

During the octave of the Epiphany, the Holy Mass

used to be celebrated in the city of Rome in all the different languages and rites to be found in her communion. The same Mass, with the same faith and the same obedience, was to be heard in a number of different tongues, with all the ancient Oriental ceremonies, and with liturgies going back to the times of the apostles. Nothing could more beautifully express the Catholicity and unity of the Church—nothing could better remind us of the crowd assembled round the apostles when they had just received the Holy Spirit. “Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and inhabitants of Mesopotamia, Judea, and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia,” or of the words I have quoted: “All they from Saba shall come, bringing gold and frankincense, and showing forth praise to the Lord.”

Our Lord manifests Himself on this day as Ruler and King, and He does so in many ways. The angels in heaven do His will, and offer Him their adoration. “When He bringeth His first-begotten Son into the world He saith, And let all the angels of God adore Him” (Heb. i. 6). All creatures in heaven and upon earth serve Him. “The winds and the sea obey Him.” “Fire, hail, snow, stormy winds which fulfil His word” (Ps. cxlviii. 8); and the star which guides His subjects to His feet may be taken as the emblem of His universal sovereignty.

But our thoughts are most attracted by one special dominion which He shows—and that is, the dominion over the hearts of men. The star was the outward symbol, but He Himself was the magnet that drew His creatures towards Him. Though hidden in the stable at Bethlehem, His influence over them could not be resisted, and Jews and Gentiles came to adore Him. When He was passing from place to place in Judea the multitudes flocked to hear Him. They followed Him into the desert, forgetting their own homes and occupations; they pressed upon Him, and would not be kept away. Those whom He called to follow Him left their father and their nets, and “leaving all things, they followed Him.”

At all times—in His cradle, during the time of His miracles and preaching, and, most of all, during His

Passion—He draws the hearts of His creatures towards Him. “And I, if I shall be lifted up from the earth, will draw all things to myself. Now this He said, signifying what death He should die” (St. John xii. 32). From the hour of His Passion till this present moment He has gone on drawing souls to Him on the cross, raising them up above this earth, and attaching them to Himself. His apostles went out into an unfriendly world to preach a Gospel which was “to the Jews a scandal, and to the Gentile foolishness,” and the world fought bitterly against it; but the hearts of men were drawn, in spite of themselves, by the secret power which accompanied them, and this power was the attraction of our Lord Himself.

As years went on, the world scoffed and persecuted, and “said all that was evil” against His followers for His name sake, and drove them to hide themselves under ground for their lives, and take shelter in the catacombs; but in a few years our Lord, from His cross, had drawn His enemies to Himself, and His faith was triumphant. “What thinkest thou hath made the light of faith so suddenly and brightly to shine in the whole world but the preaching of the name of Jesus? Is it not in the light of this name that God hath called us into His marvellous light?” These words of St. Bernard put before us what was the one great attraction which drew all men to His Church—it was Himself. It was in His name, and for Him, that the martyrs braved all that the power of the world could do. They were willing to suffer and die because they had Him in their hearts, and they were attracted to Him in such a manner as to leave all and forget all. So, too, in our own day, as in all former ages, we have seen men attracted to the Church of God, and coming, not in ones and twos, but in hundreds, and doing so in spite of every consideration of earthly loss or inconvenience. It was nothing that we could do that drew them; it was no fine theory that brought them. It was our Lord Himself in His Church; it was His star, shining in the hearts of men, that brought them to adore Him in His Church. It very often brought them, like the wisemen, from a far country and through difficult paths.

“Thy sons shall come from afar;” “the Gentiles shall walk in thy light, and kings in the brightness of thy rising.”

Let us, then, my dear brethren, go in spirit to Bethlehem, there to contemplate Him as the King and Ruler of the hearts of men. He rules them not by power—though “in His hands are power and dominion”—but by gentleness. He wishes to subject them, but by a willing and joyful obedience, and He wishes them to serve, because “to serve Him is to reign.” His grace goes forth over the whole earth, and “breatheth where it will,” and will not return to Him empty. Some souls He is, perhaps, bringing on slowly to the knowledge of His true Catholic faith. They may be afar off, and not know their way, and may have no idea whither they are going. No matter, so long as, in good faith, they follow the light that is given to them, and do not stand still or turn away; the star will guide them, and never leave them, but “go before them, until it comes and stands over where the Child is.”

Others, again, our Lord is leading by His grace on the still more difficult path of obedience. It is hard for them to obey and to take up the yoke. It is difficult for them to overcome the perversity and self-seeking of human nature and to fight against temptation. They are weak, and the world has a powerful hold on them; but, if only they will yield themselves to the guidance of grace, all difficulties will disappear, and each step that they take will show the road before them more plainly—“a good understanding to all that do it” (Ps. cx. 10). Some, again, there are whom our Lord is leading on to special perfection, and, perhaps, to a higher calling. It may be that He has chosen them for great things and for a great reward, as He did St. Paul, when He said: “Go thy way, for this man is to me a vessel of election to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings, and the children of Israel, for I will show him how great things he must suffer for my name’s sake” (Acts).

In all these different ways our Lord is working in the souls of men, and His attraction and His empire over hearts leads them, as the star of Bethlehem led the wise



men from the East. There are some who yield themselves entirely to His guidance, and are anxious to find it, and ready to follow the light whithersoever it may conduct them. They only want to know the will of God, and then they are ready to do it; and, with St. Peter's spirit, they would say: "Lord, I am ready to go with thee both into prison and to death" (St. Luke xxii. 33). These the grace of God leads on through all difficulties and over all obstacles. There are many, again, who are like the inhabitants of Jerusalem: they see the star, and are troubled; they will not follow the grace given to them, because it seems to them to require toil and self-denial; but they cannot altogether shut their eyes, and therefore they are troubled. Some, again, like King Herod, fight against grace, and repay the gentle attraction by which our Lord draws His people towards Him with hatred and ingratitude.

When we think of our Lord as the source of grace—perpetually drawing souls to Him, as He did on this day of His Epiphany, even from His cradle—we cannot but ask ourselves how we ourselves have corresponded with grace. We have all seen the light of this star a great many times, and perhaps for many years. Our Lord is "the true light which enlighteneth every man that cometh into this world, and His light has shone upon us since the days of our childhood. Have we been obedient to grace, and at least tried to follow its guidance? Can we venture to reckon ourselves amongst those who, like the wise men, have endeavoured, however humbly, to follow the light given to them, "or have we been, like the dwellers in Jerusalem, too inert, and too much attached to this world to heed the guidance which God has offered to us," or—which God forbid—have we ever been, like Herod, craftily and cruelly fighting against God, and resisting His inspirations?

What better can we do, my dear brethren, than present ourselves in spirit before our Lord on the day of His Epiphany, and promise Him a more perfect correspondence with the graces which He may think proper to give us? His grace is given to draw us to Himself, and He is "our reward exceeding great."

But the wise men did not present themselves at Bethlehem with their hands empty: "opening their treasures, they offered Him gifts—gold, frankincense, and myrrh." These offerings were not thus offered by mere accident, but were chosen as appropriately representing and acknowledging His dignity, and the character and rights which belonged to Him. The gold represents His royalty: frankincense, the smoke of which ascends before the altar of God, declares that He is not a mere earthly King, but "the King of ages, immortal and invisible, the only God:" whilst the myrrh speaks to us of mortality and suffering. As King and as God, He is far off from us; but the myrrh of His human nature shows how near to us He has come, and this seems to be the attribute in which He most delights.

Look around His dwelling-place, and see how little there is that speaks of royal dignity and divine power, and how much there is of human lowliness and weakness, and of all the privation and suffering which belong to our nature. These gifts, then, represent the three-fold character of our Lord, as God, Man, and King; or, to express them in a verse quoted by St. Jerome:

To God, made Man, born Israel's King,  
Frankincense, myrrh, and gold they bring.

Let us consider, for a moment, what offering each of these precious gifts represents. Gold is the offering which it becomes us to make to our king. It is the offering of our loyalty: we must be loyal to our heavenly King, as earthly subjects are loyal to the sovereigns of earth, but if that were possible, we should show a loyalty proportioned to the transcendent dignity which belongs to His sceptre. Even earthly loyalty is a beautiful thing. Look at what loyal subjects do to show their affection for their sovereign: what ready and willing obedience! What self-devotion and courage! What reverence and generosity! And all this, it may be, for a man who has very little personally to recommend him—simply because he is a king.

We owe to our King a loyalty a thousand times greater than is due to any earthly monarch. It should be a

loyalty in action, in word, and in thought—a loyalty which is always ready to uphold the honour of our King. If we are truly loyal we shall never allow a disloyal thought to come into our minds, or an irreverent word to cross our lips, and we shall show our loyalty by obedience, reverence, and generosity. We must, like good subjects, make the honour of our King our own honour, and His cause our cause. We must acknowledge this new-born Infant for our God, and with the wise men we must “fall down and adore Him.” To Him we must offer our deep reverence and humble adoration, and we must let our prayer ascend “like incense in His sight.” To this we must add the offering of myrrh, in token of His humanity, and recognize Him as true man as well as true God. As man, sharing our own nature, He claims from us sympathy and affection, and even from His cradle He calls upon us to “take up the cross and follow Him.”

I will conclude with the words of St. Gregory the Great: “By the gifts, therefore, which they presented unto Him, the wise men set forth three things concerning Him unto whom they offered them: by the gold that He was King—by the frankincense that He was God—and by the myrrh that He was to die. There are some heretics who believe Him to be God, but confess not His kingly dominion over all things: these offer unto Him frankincense, but refuse Him gold. There are some others who admit that He is King, but deny that He is God: these present unto Him gold, but refuse Him frankincense. There are some other heretics who profess that Christ is both God and King, but not that He took a dying nature: these offer Him gold and frankincense, but not myrrh for the manhood.

“Let us, however, present gold unto the new-born Lord, acknowledging His universal Kingship; let us offer unto Him frankincense, confessing that He who hath been made manifest to us in time, is God before time was; let us give unto Him myrrh, believing that He who cannot suffer as touching His Godhead, was made capable of death as touching the manhood which He shareth with us.”

# Catholic Sermons

BY THE REV. J. B. BAGSHAWE.

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## SERMON XLIV.

BY REV. A. B. GURDON.

### *Death.*

"Dust thou art, and into dust thou shalt return" (Gen. iii. 19).

WHILE I am writing, dear brethren, a wretched murderer is awaiting his execution in a condemned cell. The sun rises and sets, and the hours pass on, and he, all the time, is hastening to his doom. Many there are who are agitated by the thought, "How dreadful must these last days be to him—how must he count the hours, almost the minutes, as they fly." Do we remember that we, too, are all under sentence of Death? *We are all in a condemned cell!* It is only a matter of time, and one by one, each of us—all of us—will be summoned to our Death. The only difference, in fact, between us and the murderer, to whom I have alluded, is this: He has an advantage over us. We, like him, are certainly to die; but, unlike him, we know not the hour of our death. He has a measured interval of time before him. We also have time, but it is not measured. It is uncertain; and, though we have preparations to make, we do not know how long those preparations must last. In fact, we must be *always* prepared. Now let us, first of all, consider what Death is, for there are many mistakes made upon the subject. Death is simply the separation of soul and body. Some people seem to think, by the way they talk, that there is some magic in Death. They speak very gloomily of some person who is dying, as one who is very much unprepared, as being utterly indifferent to God and the things of God; but no sooner is the breath out of his body, than they say, "Ah! he is happy now." "He is in a better place," and so on. They seem to think that Death is a conjuror, and that a soul which is sunk in



“trespasses and sins,” up to the last moment of life, is suddenly converted by Death into an ardent saint, burning with love of God, and one in feeling and disposition with the blessed saints and angels in heaven. Now, let us thoroughly understand the truth about this. *Death changes nothing.* The soul is exactly the same the moment *after* Death as it was the moment *before* Death. Death simply liberates the soul from the body, and enlarges the sphere of its action. Nor, again, is Death—what it is sometimes described to be—a “waking up.” The soul which has just “shuffled off its mortal coil” goes on thinking as it did before. When a person wakes from sleep, or recovers from a swoon, we say, with truth, that that person is waking up. But there is all the difference in the world between Death, and sleep, or fainting. In the latter cases, the soul is still in the body, and dependent upon the conditions of the body to which it is united; but in Death it is freed from these conditions, and, as I said before, goes on thinking into the next world, just as it did in this. Consciousness is not suspended for a moment. The question, then, comes to this—What is the state of my soul *now*? Is it in a state of grace, or in a state of enmity to God? Are my tastes, aims, hopes, loves, interests, connected with heaven, my eternal home, or with earth, which I am certain sooner or later to leave? Do I use this earth, with its duties, pleasures, and excitements, as a mere passage to another world, or is this world *an end in itself*, so that all the energies, occupations, and thoughts of my soul are taken up in it and its surroundings?

Now, dear brethren, these are momentous questions, and eternity depends upon our answering them satisfactorily. *We all die alone*, although there may be thousands dying close to us. Each death is a separate, distinct, individual act. No one can go with us to the other side—not the friends who are weeping by our beds—not the priest who is holding up the crucifix before our dying eyes. We die utterly, entirely alone, just as if no one else died, or would die. And we alone can tell *how* we die.

What mistakes, again, are often made upon this question ! You meet a person who has just lost a relation, and you inquire about his affliction, and perhaps he will say : “ Ah ! Father—thanks be to God, he saw a priest before he died ? ” Well, dear brethren, I say “ thanks be to God ” too, but recollect that when it is said of a dying man that he “ saw a priest,” all is not said—no, *nor the half of all is not said*. The question is, Was he in the dispositions to benefit by the ministrations of the priest ? His own conscience alone could answer that question. The priest is the minister of the most saving Sacraments, it is true, but he cannot change the heart of the receiver of those Sacraments. No, nor can he *read* the heart either, so that when another person may say, “ My dear friend is gone, but I have every hope of his salvation, for Father So-and-so thought very well of him,” he expresses a good hope truly, for the good opinion of a pious and experienced man is always worth having ; but, recollect, there is always something more behind, which must be satisfactory before *all* is satisfactory, and that is : *Was the individual conscience of the dead man right with God ?* and that is a secret which is revealed to none.

So that, you see, Death is a very awful thing, because it is such a very responsible thing. We cannot shift the burden upon somebody else. We meet Death alone, and what comes after Death depends upon us alone.

I said just now that Death does not change the soul : “ As the tree falls, so it lies ; ” but I did not say that Death does not change the *surroundings* of the soul. These are, indeed, changed and enlarged, and that is why our conscience will never speak so vividly and distinctly as the moment after we are dead. Then we shall see things *exactly as they are*, not as we have made them *appear to be*. That old conscience of ours—obscured, defaced, transformed by us, as it may be—will return to be the clear mirror of God’s justice it once was, when we are dead. Familiar sights, sounds, and things of sense will have faded away for ever, and with nothing to distract our view, or prejudice our judgment, we and our consciences will be alone.

If we examine this change of scene, we shall be better able, perhaps, to judge of our present preparation for Death. Death is spoken of as being a *loss* and a *gain*. When any one dies, we speak of him as having "lost his life;" and, on the other hand, St. Paul says, "For me to die is gain." What are these losses and gains of Death? With regard to the losses. First: There will be no more sensible things as we understand them—no more earthly dignity, or power, or money, or houses, or lands, or goods of any kind. We leave all behind. There will be no kings, and no peasants, no people of good fortune or of bad fortune. Death equalizes all.

Well now, dear brethren, this is a very old fashioned truth—some people might call it a platitude—but if you could read the hearts of all the people you meet in the streets of a large city, in one day, you would find it by no means an old fashioned truth. Not only those who have much to lose, but those who have not, are (alas! how many!) thinking of nothing else but what Death will infallibly strip them of. Well, now, before we go any further, are *we* of this number? Do we think that, in some wonderful way, that which would afflict us so dreadfully now, will be made palatable to us, simply because we happen to be dead? If money, and place, and "getting on," and nice things and comforts, are all in all to us now, why should they be suddenly as dirt to us, simply because we happen to die? As a matter of fact, they will not be so to us. We shall miss them; they will be a dead loss to us.

Again: by Death we lose our bodies. It is quite true that in the resurrection we shall find them again—but for a time we lose them. And we lose them under the most degrading circumstances. Go into the tomb, and look at our bodies six months after we are dead. Will not those words of holy Job be strictly applicable to us? "I have said to rottenness: Thou art my father; to worms: my mother and my sister" (Job xvii. 14). What do we think of our bodies now? Have we lived entirely for them? Have our souls been made subservient to them—to think of them, to consult them, to worship them al-

most? There were some people of whom the apostle wrote, "whose god is their belly." Are we of that number? If so, how shall we feel when suddenly deprived of these bodies?

Think not, dear brethren, once more, that in some wonderful way Death will reconcile us to the loss. "He has said, Who is the Almighty, that we should serve Him? and what does it profit us if we pray to Him? His bowels are full of fat, and his bones are moistened with marrow. Ask any one of them that go by the way, and you shall perceive that he *knoweth* these same things. *He shall be brought to the graves, and shall watch in the heap of the Dead*" (Job xxi. 15, 29, 32).

Let us turn now to the consideration of the *gains* of Death. I am not now speaking of the rewards which God has promised after Death to those who love and serve Him. I am simply describing the gains, according to Holy Scripture, which will infallibly follow from the act of dying. One of these gains is the *sight of God*. "Every eye shall see Him." To look on God's Face was the aspiration of all the holy men of old; Jacob, Moses, David, and still more of those who, living after Christ, have known Him, "looking through a glass darkly," and longed to see Him. Well, now, do *we* long to see Him? I will explain what I mean by an illustration. Most of us, in the course of our lives, have come across numbers of people, some of whom we have loved very much—whose lives have been welded into our lives—whose counsels we have shared—whose characters we have studied—whose hearts we have known—and these we call our friends. And there are others, also, whom we have been in the habit of meeting—whom we have casually come across—in whom we are not particularly interested—and those we call our acquaintances. When, after a long parting, we are told that we shall certainly meet one of these two classes of people we have known, how different are our feelings with regard to the approaching interview! In the one case, we are excited with the interest and joy of the meeting. We imagine what our friend will look like. We count the hours till the



happy moment arrives. In the other case, we are simply indifferent. We hope our acquaintance is well—we have no reason to hope otherwise—but our hearts do not beat with emotion; our pulses are not a whit accelerated; we are not much more glad to meet him than we were sorry to part with him. *Now, is God our friend or our acquaintance?* If He is only our acquaintance now, why should Death suddenly turn Him into a friend? Why should it be such a gain to see Him? It will, obviously, not be a gain. We have thought very little about Him. We have not known Him. We knew *about* Him. We might have known some who were His friends; but He was not our friend; and after Death, He will not be our friend either. Let us pass to another of Death's gains. *Immunity from sin.* The thought of this gain has been such a joy to the saints of God, that they have hardly been able to restrain their ecstasy when it has occurred to them. So horrified have they been at the vision of sin, that they longed for wings to flee away, and be at rest, anywhere, even in purgatory, where sin cannot enter, and so be at rest. And those who are not saints, but who hate sin, are ever thinking of this wonderful gain of Death—a life of sinlessness. But to them Death will simply be a going on of what was in their souls before. Have we such a horror of sin? When, from human infirmity, we fall into it, are we so anxious to resort to the path of penance *immediately*, and get our sins washed away? If not, and we are perfectly content to remain months, and perhaps years, with our souls festering in sin, why should Death make us altogether of another mind? It will not. "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still; and he that is filthy, let him be filthy still."

So, once more, the Scripture speaks of Death as releasing us from certain miseries—among other things, *the wicked cease from troubling*. So one of the gains of Death is to be rid of these troublers. If we look into the lives of those who have followed Christ most perfectly, we shall see how much they suffered from ungodly men. Contact with them, while it called forth their charity, was a positive cross to them at the same time. *Do wicked*

*people trouble us?* The “wicked” in the sight of God are, as you know, not excessively dangerous and unpleasant people. They may be, on the contrary, very good company. They are the enemies of God, for they defy, or ignore Him: but they may be our dearest friends—I don’t mean of relationship, but of choice. We have taken delight in their wit and conversation, we have perhaps compromised our religion to stand well with them; we have copied their ways, and adopted their maxims.

When will they suddenly develop into “troublers”? Certainly not at Death, which makes no change in them or in us. That is one of Death’s gains, which has little to do with us. Let us finish the sentence I have quoted: “And the weary are at rest.” Who are the “weary” in the Bible? Not those who are weary of sin, or pleasure, or labour for self and gain alone. Those who are weary in the battle for God, in their fight with self, the world, and the devil—the weary in the great race to heaven—the weary from the perpetual strain which, up to the very last, nature must feel in order to correspond with grace. A great deal of sentiment is written and spoken about the “rest of the grave”—the “quiet turf”—the “pillow of the tomb,” &c., &c.—which have as much meaning, in the Scripture sense, as if you told a man who had just got up in the morning from his bed, that you wished him good night, and begged him not, under any circumstances, to allow himself to be disturbed. What is there to rest from? The satiety of pleasure? The fight for more sin, for more wealth, for more of this world? Evidently, the rest of Death will be no gain to one who, spiritually speaking, has been fast asleep all his life. Depend upon it, dear brethren, there is no such an examiner of conscience as Death, if we will only meditate upon it. Then, again, what light Death throws upon the nature of sin. “The sting of Death is sin.” Men are often very curious to investigate the subject of that eternal punishment which God has threatened in regard to those who rebel against Him to the last. They try and reconcile the justice of God, as they imagine it, with what they conceive ought to be His

mercy. But they look out of themselves. The true idea of eternity is in our own hearts. Ask any one you meet, who is living according to the flesh, who is intent on gratifying every passion that presents itself, whether he would not like to go on with that life for ever. He would say "Certainly." "Given certain changes—no old age—no sickness—no poverty—no opposition from those around me—and I should like this life for all eternity." When sadness or distrust cloud his enjoyment for a time, it is the thought of his mortality—not a change in his will—which has caused the disturbance: never-ending pleasure is the dream of human nature. Death, that solemn preacher, *will* intrude himself into every banquet, and suddenly disclose his fearful form at scenes where youth and gaiety run riot, and that makes his very name so hateful. Death is the sting of sin, just as sin is the sting of Death.

Dear reader, is Death a very hateful name to you? If so, why? Jesus died, and Mary died, and the saints have died, and (as St. Paul says) Death was gain to them. There is a fear of Death which all are intended to feel, for it is God's great punishment for sin. Our Blessed Lord felt it. "He began to fear, and to be heavy" (St. Mark xiv. 33). And not to fear Death at all would, perhaps, argue an irreverent and superficial mind—a mind incapable of looking much beyond the present and rightly estimating the malice and consequences of sin. Generally speaking, people who say they do not fear Death do really fear it; but they try and think about it as little as possible. But this is a very different thing from an *inordinate* fear of Death. The devil often tempts us to this, in order to weaken our confidence in God, and to turn our thoughts away from our duties, and from prayer, and perhaps even from the necessary preparation for that very Death we fear so much. It is not at all uncommon to see people who fear Death very much leading the most careless and ungodly lives, just as if they were going to stay here for ever. The reason of this is—that Death is a mystery, and life *to them* is not. There are many outside the Church who pride themselves on what they

call their "reasonable religion"—who say "they will believe nothing but what they can understand by common sense," and so on; and when Death stares them in the face they are appalled at his mysterious appearance. Here is something that they cannot understand—here is a mystery that baffles all inquiry and all experience, that has, as regards what is beyond it, to be *taken on faith*. There are, unhappily, many Catholics, too, who fear Death inordinately, for the same reason. They do not live lives of faith—they do not act upon faith—they do not reflect on the mysteries of faith. No wonder that, when this dread mystery of faith comes across them, they shrink back and tremble! The true cure for this undue dread of Death, dear brethren, is to lead a supernatural life. By a supernatural life I mean a life which dwells upon the unseen. Faith is defined by St. Paul to be the "evidence of things that appear not;" and to act upon the unseen—to do things for the unseen—to be at home with the unseen, while we are alive—robs Death of half his terrors. If, for instance, we realized, every time that we went to Holy Communion, that the God we hope to be with us in the valley of the shadow of Death—to comfort us with "His rod and staff"—is the same God we have just received into our hearts, how fully we could trust Him to take care of us then, as we are taking care of Him now! What a filial feeling would it not excite in us!—a feeling that—though we cannot see across the dark river of Death—One, whom we know now, will carry us across, and welcome us there. We have sent our thoughts, as it were, to the other side before we go there ourselves. The country, the people, the life even of those beyond the tomb, have been explored in our prayers and aspirations, and the change ceases to be violent in proportion to the detachment we have exercised regarding this world and sensible objects. Let us now, for a moment, consider how *God looks upon Death*. "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints." There is something in the act of dying especially precious to God, although Death is His chosen punishment. But some deaths are particularly precious



in His sight. Let us examine them. There is the Death of the humble man—the death of one who forgets self and its merits, and rests entirely upon the mercy of Almighty God. Such a Death is full of appreciation of the least of the Church's blessings—the lighted candle, the holy water, the scapular round the neck. More especially is he careful to avoid anything like the spirit of triumph and jubilation. The sinner going before an All-pure Judge cannot afford to be triumphant. True humility avoids, on the other hand, animal indifference. It makes the most of its time; it will have all it can get. It is so distrustful of itself and so reliant on the mercy of God, that it leaves not a stone unturned, as it were, in the mine of prayer, lest some grace should be passed unobserved. It is very simple, too; it does not act a part. It does not pose itself, and make telling last speeches, or give good advice—or do anything, in fact, for the sake of bystanders, or in order to be remembered and honoured after Death. As has been well said, “It is the death of the child, who dies looking into his father's face.”

Then there is the Death of detachment. As I said before, this is more like a translation than a death. If the roots of the tree are gradually disengaged from the surrounding earth, there will be little difficulty in shifting it to another place. If gradually, during life, the soul has become detached from the things of earth, it leaves the body, as it were, with natural ease. Hence, dear brethren, the especial blessing and grace of a state of poverty. “Oh! Death, how bitter is the remembrance of thee to a man that hath peace in his possessions: to a man that is at rest, and whose ways are prosperous in all things, and that is yet able to take meat! O! Death, thy sentence is welcome to the man that is in need, and to him whose strength faileth!” (Eccles. xli. 1, 2, 3). And yet how many to whom God has denied wealth—in order to attach them more completely to Himself, and to enable them to die easily—cast aside their privilege—are fretting, and fuming, and intriguing, that they may obtain that very wealth which makes Death so bitter! The Death of the truly poor—the poor in spirit as well as poor in fact—is,

indeed, precious in the sight of God. Lastly, dear brethren, let us think a little on the consolations of Death. When our Lord speaks of Death, He frequently makes use of a peculiar image. He calls it a *marriage feast*. And so, if you remember, the Church speaks of it. When you were baptized, and the ceremony of placing the burning light in the hand of your sponsor took place, the priest said, "Receive this burning light, and keep thy Baptism blameless; observe the Commandments of God, that, *when the Lord shall come to the nuptials*, thou mayest meet Him, together with all the saints, in the heavenly court, and have everlasting life, and live for ever and ever." And so Jesus Christ comes to every one, at the last, as a Bridegroom. The soul of each one of us is His bride; it was betrothed to Him in Baptism. To the foulest, as well as the fairest, He comes as a Bridegroom. Are we ready, dear brethren, to go out and meet Him? Are we fit for the nuptials? When St. Elizabeth of Hungary lay dying, we are told that she sang hymns of joy and praise; but when the last moment came—just before her beautiful spirit passed away—her face suddenly became grave and fixed. "Silence!" she said; "silence! The Bridegroom cometh!"

Yes; that must be the end of all of us. Earthly sights vanish—earthly sounds grow still. We sink down—down, away from earth and all earth's supports—into the great silence. Only then the Bridegroom cometh. He comes to seek His betrothed. It is to a marriage feast we are invited. There is only one important question, dear brethren, but it is so important, it must be answered. What is the answer we should give to it now? *In what condition will He find the bride?*

Go back through your life, and look upon your soul in the light of a bride. See it in youth, fresh from the waters of Baptism. How long did the first benediction of the Bridegroom rest upon it? Has it been restored by Penance, if befouled? and, if so, how far is that spirit of repentance being maintained? And the ring and the robe, the Bridegroom's gifts—where are they? Are they kept faithfully for Him? The ring is our faith. Have

we allowed the world to tamper with it? The robe is our purity. Have we allowed the devil to soil it?

If the Bridegroom came to-night, would He find the *ring gone*? In the case of some Catholics He would. Their faith is dead; they are in mortal sin. Would He in our case? And the robe? Not washed, perhaps, for years! And He the God of stainless purity! Should these pages meet the eye of any one in this sad condition, oh, my brother, prepare for Death, prepare for the Bridegroom—*go to Confession at once!* There is no other question of equal importance to you as this. “*If the Bridegroom came to-night, in what condition would He find the bride?*”

And for you, dear reader, who have long been preparing for Death—what a consolation to be told that, in the eyes of God, it is a marriage! Death is simply the occasion of the Bridegroom claiming His bride. “Let us be glad and rejoice, and give glory to Him; for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife has prepared herself. And it is granted to her that she should clothe herself with fine linen glittering and white” (Apoc. xix. 7, 8).

# Catholic Sermons

BY REV. J. B. BAGSHAWE.

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## SERMON XLV.

### *Contrition.*

“Rend your hearts, and not your garments, and turn to the Lord your God”  
(Joel ii. 13).

CONTRITION is the most important of all the conditions necessary for the forgiveness of sins. We know this very well, my dear brethren; but, for all that, many people do take but little trouble to move themselves to Contrition when they prepare for Confession. I have already spoken of the conditions necessary for receiving the Sacrament of Penance, but it will be as well to repeat them in a few words.

On the priest's part there must be a valid absolution. Absolution is the sentence of forgiveness, without which the priest cannot exercise the power of remitting sins intrusted to him by our Lord. A judge on the bench can only exercise his authority according to certain legal forms, and in the same way a priest, in the tribunal of Penance, can only forgive sins by using the necessary form of words. To make this sentence of pardon availing for the remission of sins, three conditions are necessary on the penitent's part, which are Contrition, Confession, and Satisfaction. I have already spoken of Confession: it is accusing ourselves of our sins—that is, of at least all the mortal sins of which we are conscious. Satisfaction is “doing the penance given us by the priest.” This means that, at the time of our Confession, we must be willing to accept the punishment imposed upon us for our sins. This punishment is almost invariably according to the present discipline of the Church—some short prayer which we undertake to say with that intention. If all these conditions for the Sacrament are duly supplied, it is quite certain that we receive the pardon of our



sins, because we have our Lord's promise, that the sentence pronounced on earth shall be ratified in heaven. "Whatsoever thou shalt bind upon earth, it shall be bound also in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth, it shall be loosed also in heaven" (St. Matt. xvi. 19).

Now, in one sense, all these parts of Penance are equally important: if you wilfully omitted any one of them, and so refused to comply with the conditions which our Lord has laid down, your sins would certainly not be forgiven. In another sense, however, there is the greatest possible difference and importance. It might very easily happen, that you were quite unable to make any proper confession of your sins, or to do anything by way of satisfaction for them, and yet you might receive the Sacrament of Penance; or, again, it might be quite impossible to receive the Sacrament at all, and yet your sins might be forgiven without it. Without Contrition, however, sin can never be forgiven under any circumstances. All the parts of Penance are, commonly speaking, necessary for the forgiveness of sin, because our Lord has chosen to appoint them as the means of pardon in the Christian dispensation; but if He had willed it, He might have appointed any other outward signs to forgive sin, which would have done as well; but sorrow for sin is, *in itself*, essential for a reconciliation with Almighty God: that is, we cannot conceive that God would ever, in any dispensation, or under any circumstances, forgive sins without repentance.

The reason of this is plain. God is in Himself infinitely perfect, so that even "the heavens are not pure in His sight" (Job xv. 15). "The Lord our God is righteous, and there is no iniquity in Him" (Ps. xci. 16). By His own Divine Nature He hates sin with an infinite hatred, and it cannot ever cease to be odious and abominable in His sight. When a man sins he chooses evil, and adheres to it, and, as it were, identifies himself with it. He has taken part against God, and, as the apostle tells us, "Changed the truth of God into a lie: and worshipped and served the creature, rather than the Creator who is blessed for ever" (Rom. i. 25). As God can never change, and

can never cease to hate iniquity, there can be no reconciliation between a sinner and his God, so long as the sinner adheres to his sin. There must be a change of heart and of will, before there can be any forgiveness. "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unjust man his thoughts, and let him return to the Lord, and He will have mercy on him, and to our God, for He is bountiful to forgive" (Isaias lv. 7). Let the unjust man forsake his way, and *then* there is forgiveness; but until he changes there can be none.

If any man, therefore, has been so unfortunate as to offend his Maker by sin, there is only one remedy, and that is a change of heart and will, a regret for the past, and the intention of amendment for the future. No external means of pardon can be of any avail without this change; no zeal or good works can buy for you the forgiveness of sins unless you have first turned away from them and renounced them. Our Lord's words addressed to sinners are very plain and decided. "Unless you shall do penance, you shall all likewise perish" (St. Luke xiii. 3). The word which we translate here by "do penance" means principally, and first of all, "a change of mind"—it means more than a mere change of mind, because it includes those things which change of mind would bring with it, as when our Lord speaks of "doing penance in sackcloth and ashes;" but we cannot too carefully remember that the first and most essential part of it is the "change of mind."

The next thing we have to consider is the sort of sorrow which is meant by the word Contrition. A good many people seem to fancy that when they have read over the "Act of Contrition" contained in the prayer-book, they have done all that is necessary—at least, they do not seem to trouble themselves very much beyond that. We can learn a good deal about the sort of sorrow for sin which is required from the very name given to it. "Contrition" means "breaking," and it means that the sorrow we are to have should be such as can, in some sense, be described as "a breaking of the heart," or, perhaps, it may be better said "a breaking of the will."

We all know the sort of intense sorrow which is described as resulting in a broken heart. Our sorrow for sins ought, then, to be one which we are not ashamed to compare to this kind of sorrow. Nothing can better explain the real, hearty, energetic kind of sorrow that we ought to have for our sins than the name of Contrition, which is applied to it.

It may be objected that it is almost impossible for any ordinary Christians, when they are grieving for their sins, to feel the sensation of grief and the pain of heart which they experience on some other occasions. That is very true, but we might take our sins to heart a great deal more if we liked, and it is our own fault if our sorrow so little deserves to be called a breaking of heart as it does.

Listen, my dear brethren, to the words of a great penitent—words which are very familiar to us all—and then think how far they represent the feelings which we present to our offended God when we seek His pardon: “I have laboured in my groanings, every night I will wash my bed. I will water my couch with my tears.” “For Thine arrows are fastened in me, and Thy hand hath been strong upon me. There is no health in my flesh, because of Thy wrath; there is no peace to my bones, because of my sins. For mine iniquities are gone over my head, and, as a heavy burden, are become heavy upon me.” “Wash me yet more from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin, for I know my iniquity, and my sin is always before me” (Ps. vi., xxxiv., and l.).

If these were the words which the thought of his sins put into the mouth of the penitent David, we may, at any rate, have some little feeling and warmth in our sorrow when we come to ask for forgiveness.

Now, however, let us get from generalities to practical details, and let us consider precisely what are the requisites for a true Contrition. The Catechism says that “Contrition is a hearty sorrow for our sins by which we have offended so good a God, with a firm purpose of amendment.” The first condition is that it should be supernatural—that is to say, it must be a sorrow arising

from supernatural motives. If you were very sorry for your sins, but your grief arose from natural consideration—that is, from something belonging to this world—it would not be Contrition, however earnest your sorrow might be. Supposing a man's sin has brought with it evil consequences, and he grieves because actual punishment has come upon him, or because he is suffering from fear and remorse, as Judas did after his treason: his sorrow is not Contrition. A natural sorrow for the evil effects of sin very often leads men on to a true Contrition, and God sometimes sends temporal punishments to the wicked, that they may see the evil of their ways, and be led to repentance; but still it is not sufficient, in itself, for Contrition. In the parable of the prodigal son we have an example of the way in which the grief and pain arising from temporal distresses lead people on to a real sorrow for their sins. "After he had spent all, there came a mighty famine in that country . . . and he began to want; and he would fain have filled his belly with the husks the swine did eat," and then it was that he began to "return to himself." From this beginning he went on step by step to a very deep and humble and loving sorrow for his offences, and to a complete reconciliation with his father.

There are many motives for being sorry for sin which are very good in themselves; a person who has sinned may grieve very heartily for his crime, simply on account of a natural feeling of the pain and sorrow he has brought on others, or of the disgrace into which he has fallen, or other similar reasons. These motives for sorrow are very useful as helps to lead sinners to a true Contrition, but they are not Contrition, and will not supply its place. Real Contrition must come from the grace of God, and must be a sorrow for having offended God and violated His Commandments, for the love of God, or the fear of His punishments, or from a consideration of the baseness of sin by which we have offended Him. The fear of God generally goes before the love of God. If once we grieve for our sins, "because by them we have lost heaven and deserved hell," we are on the road to grieve



for them also for the love of God, who is infinitely good in Himself, and infinitely good to us, because "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom."

I have now to speak of another quality which must belong to Contrition: it must be *universal*—that is, it must be a sorrow for *all* the sins by which we have offended God. It sometimes happens that people have a feeling of great regret for some sins, whilst they are quite indifferent to others. It may be that they are very sensitive to the disgrace which belongs to certain crimes—to some of those offences which this world views with special abhorrence—whilst, at the same time, they think very little of sins to which, perhaps, they are only too much accustomed. Sometimes, indeed, you find people who will not bring themselves to any kind of regret for some offences against the law of God, though they think they are really contrite for others. It is plain that this is not real Contrition. If a man is really sorry for his sins *because they have offended God*, it is clear that he will repent of *everything* which has grievously offended Him—whether it is a thing which strikes his own imagination painfully or not. It is, therefore, necessary to include in our sorrow everything which has deprived us of God's grace.

There is one other condition which a true sorrow for sin must always possess: it must be the highest *kind* of sorrow. This does not mean that you must necessarily feel it as acutely as you do many natural sorrows—that, indeed, to most people is impossible; but it must be of a higher character than any other sorrow. If you love God at all, you must love Him above all things, in the sense that you prefer Him to all things. In the same way, if you regret and turn away from sin, it must be as the greatest of all evils, because it deprives you of the Supreme Good.

Contrition has two parts: it looks to the past with regret, and it looks to the future with purpose of amendment. A sorrow for sin which did not contain any purpose of keeping out of sin for the future is plainly a mockery; and this explains what is meant by saying that Contrition must be the highest kind of sorrow. There

are many things which you may bitterly and truly regret, even whilst you know that you must, and certainly would, do them again. You might, for instance, grieve very much for having given pain and offence to one of your friends, and yet you might feel that, under the same circumstances, you would have to do the same thing again. Such a feeling and intention as this, however, will not do for Contrition. You must regret sin as a thing which *no* circumstance can ever make necessary or authorize, and you must intend, without any reserve, to avoid it for the future.

A firm purpose of amendment is “a resolution to avoid not only sin, but also the dangerous occasions of sin.” This resolution is essential to Contrition, and is, practically, the best test of the sincerity of your sorrow. People are very apt to deceive themselves as to their own feelings, because feeling depends very much upon the natural temperament and disposition of individuals. Some are very easily moved, perhaps even to tears. They hear a touching sermon, or they have meditated upon some affecting subject, and, for the moment, they are carried away by their emotions, although, perhaps, there is very little change of heart; and they have forgotten all their tender feelings by the time they have dried their tears. Others, again, are not so easily touched; their imaginations and feelings are slow to move, and they may easily fancy that they have not any real sorrow for sin because they have not the same acute sensations as their neighbours; whereas, in reality, they may be much better disposed.

Let us here say a word, my dear brethren, about those tender emotions and good feelings which God sometimes gives to us. It is a great blessing to have a heart easily touched by spiritual things—a heart which has not become hard or cold, and which does not confine its sensibilities to earthly affections. “Who will give water to my head, and a fountain of tears to my eyes?” says the Prophet Jeremias; and, in the same way, it ought to be our desire to weep as we should for our sins. Our Blessed Lord Himself, “in the days of His flesh, with a strong

cry and tears, offering up prayers and supplications" (Heb. v. 7), did not disdain to be affected by these natural human feelings. They are a great grace from God, which we must encourage, and of which we never need be ashamed. On the other hand, emotions are not enough by themselves; they are meant to lead us on to acts; and if they do not succeed in moving us to doing something, they are of no value. Such emotions are, therefore, sometimes dangerous, because they delude people as to the state of their own hearts and wills, and they fancy their hearts are changed, whereas it is only their imaginations which are touched. Our Lord says: "By their fruits you shall know them," and the test of the value of emotion is the good it leads to.

A real purpose of amendment is not a thing which is so easily mistaken. If you have a real, hearty purpose to do better—to begin in earnest and amend your life—to keep out of sin and to serve God—then you may be sure that your Contrition is a genuine change of heart, and not a mere passing feeling. But, then, a purpose of amendment doesn't mean merely *saying* that you are going to do better. It is a very easy thing to make a purpose of amendment in mere words. "I firmly purpose, by the assistance of Thy grace, never more to offend Thee for the time to come, and carefully to avoid the occasions of sinning." We have all said these very solemn words times without number; but did they mean much, and has much come of them?

When people say, in a vague way, that they have a firm purpose to amend their lives, they often forget to ask themselves when they are going to begin, and how they mean to do it. Perhaps it is that they intend to lead much better lives *some time or other*—by and bye—but are not quite ready to begin at once; they do not think of making any great change just now. This sort of purpose of amendment is very much like the will-o'-the-wisp, which is said to delude travellers. They see a light in the distance, and they think they are getting nearer to it, whereas it always keeps the same distance ahead, and so, it may be, lures them to their destruction.

In the same way, we may keep on purposing amendment till death surprises us, and the amendment itself may be just as far off as ever.

Again, your firm purpose of being good, sometimes means: "I will be good if I can do so without any trouble or self-denial." People are not prepared to count the cost, and resolutely to brace themselves to the exertion and self-sacrifice which are obviously necessary. Such a proposed amendment is obviously a delusion, since it is quite clear that we can never be good and do our duty without some sacrifice; and, if we do not mean the sacrifice, we do not really *mean* the amendment. "He who will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me." If we do not at all intend to take up the cross, we certainly do not mean following our Lord.

A real purpose of amendment includes not only the *end*, but the means. You have no doubt about this in common life. A man means to go to a place—then he clearly means to take the road that leads there—he thinks of the distance, of the different paths he may take, of the modes of conveyance available for his purpose, and so forth. If he didn't do this, you would say he didn't mean it at all. In the same way, if a man wants a job of work done, he at once sets himself to consider the ways and means for getting it done: without this, you would say his meaning it was only talk, and went for nothing.

What is true of all worldly purposes applies to real purpose of amendment. You must not be content with saying, "I am going to be better," but you must add, "I am going to begin at once, and to take such and such steps of reform." You say, "I am grieved for this sin, and mean to avoid it." Yes; but in your heart you know that certain company is sure to lead to it; have you made up your mind to keep out of this company?—or do you mean to frequent it just as you did before? You are grieved that you have fallen into bad habits of sin, and mean to amend. Certainly; but have you thought how this habit can be checked, and made up your mind to



adopt the course which you know will check it? A man has a custom of swearing and using bad language: if he took the trouble to set himself some little penance every time that he forgot himself, the habit would very soon be overcome. If, for example, he said a "Hail, Mary," or "Gloria Patri," whenever he was conscious that he had fallen into his bad habit, he would soon cease to use any such language. Do men mean such remedies as this? I do not ask, Do they always faithfully *use* the remedies, but do they ever really *mean* to use them? If not, can they really flatter themselves that their protestations of a firm purpose of amendment are of much use?

Once more: people say they are going to amend their lives, but they know very well that amendment of life, and keeping out of sin, means regularity in receiving the Sacraments, and also reasonable diligence in prayer. Their faith teaches them that they cannot be good without using the appointed means of grace, and experience fully confirms this truth. So long as they are tolerably regular in their duties, and take reasonable pains about prayer, they keep on pretty well; but when they remain away from the Sacraments, and neglect prayer, they soon fall into sin. Such being the case, it is clear that an intention to lead a better life *ought* to mean a resolution to go regularly to Confession and Communion at certain intervals, and to give a certain portion of time every week, and every day, to prayer and the consideration of the Presence of God. Very often, however, people do *not* mean this; they profess to mean amendment; but they do not contemplate coming to the Sacraments more frequently, or praying more. They want to get through the present Confession decently well, and then, tacitly, mean to shelve the whole question, until circumstances make it necessary to receive the Sacraments again.

I do not mean, of course, that people say so to themselves, or are conscious that such is their intention, but I am afraid that if they cross-examined themselves honestly as to their real meaning, they would find that their purpose of amendment was something like what I have described.

When a man has committed a very grievous sin, the guilt of which strikes his imagination, there is not much fear that he will not have a good purpose of amendment : the danger is when the sins into which we fall are mere ordinary and commonplace transgressions. In cases of venial sin, for instance, there is great danger of confessing them without any real purpose of amendment. And, therefore, people very often find themselves confessing the same fault, year after year, with very little improvement. Does not this give us a good reason for doubting the sincerity of the purposes of amendment they have been making ?

The mere fact that we fall back again into sin does not prove that our promises were not sincere, because our nature is weak and changeable, and even our best resolutions easily break down ; but still we have reason for disquiet if we see no sign of an effort, and can find nothing but words. In our worldly affairs, even if we do not carry out our purposes completely, there is generally *something* to show if we have been in earnest, and so it should be in spiritual things. If we have *not* been in earnest in our purposed amendment, have we not great reason to fear ? What greater affront can we offer to Almighty God than professions which mean nothing, and solemn promises which are insincere ? “ They loved Him with their mouth, and with their tongue they lied unto Him ” (Ps. lxxvii. 36). “ Cursed be he that doth the work of the Lord deceitfully ” (Jer. xlviii. 10). What can be more deceitful than a series of promises which mean nothing and are never carried into effect ? On the other hand, a real purpose of amendment is not only the best sign of true Contrition, but is the most effective instrument for a change of life. However weak you may be, if you will only go on, always meaning to be good, and intending honestly to fight against temptation, you will certainly be victorious in the long run—and, by God’s grace, good intention will receive the crown, in spite of human frailty.

I must conclude by once more dwelling on the importance of a very sincere and earnest Contrition. It is not

only the essential preparation for the pardon of sin, but it makes all things easy, and makes grace abundant. Those who are really humbled before God, and heartily sorry for having offended Him, find no difficulties. It is easy for them to confess their sins, and make atonement for them, and reproach before men is but a small thing in their eyes. The conditions for pardon which our Lord has appointed seem to them but too easy and gracious, because they really feel what sin is. "A contrite and humble heart, O God, thou wilt not despise." The Lord cannot resist the pleadings of a heart full of humility and Contrition, and He pours out His graces abundantly upon those who come to Him with true and heartfelt sorrow: the greater the sorrow, the more abundant will be the graces which His Sacraments will confer.

We have all abundant reasons for sorrow. "If we say that we have no sin we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (St. John i. 8). If your conscience does not recall any grievous offence since your last Confession, you have only to look back on your past lives: "I will recount to Thee all my years in the bitterness of my soul" (Isaias xxxviii. 15). "Be not without fear for sin forgiven, and add not sin upon sin" (Ecclus. v. 5). It may be that we have already grieved for our past offences, and hope that they have been forgiven, but we cannot too often renew our sorrow for them. Sorrow for the past is the best preservative for the future.

Whence, my dear brethren, shall we get this most excellent sorrow? "Who will give water to my head, and a fountain of tears to my eyes?" We shall strive for it in vain by our own exertions: it must be the gift of God Himself. We must ask Him to do for us what He promised to the Jews: "I will give you a new heart, and put a new spirit within you: I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and give you a heart of flesh" (Ezech. xxxvi. 6). "Create a clean heart in me, O God, and renew a right spirit within my bowels" (Ps. l. 12).

# Catholic Sermons

BY REV. J. B. BAGSHAWE.

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## SERMON XLVI.

### *Satisfaction.*

“Therefore I reprehend myself, and do penance in dust and ashes” (Job. xlii. 6).

THESE words, my dear brethren, put before us another essential part of the Sacrament of Penance. It is not enough for us to be our own accusers by Confession ; we must also be ready to execute justice on ourselves by making Satisfaction. The Catechism tells us that “Satisfaction is doing the penance given us by the priest.” A “penance” means a punishment of some sort, which the priest, in his capacity of judge, awards to us as a Satisfaction to the justice of Almighty God, which is offended by sin. It is absolutely necessary, in order to receive pardon, that the penitent should be ready to accept, and have the will to perform, this penance. A disposition to make amends goes naturally with sorrow for sin. We cannot, therefore, fancy any one really contrite who is not willing to do something in the way of Satisfaction. According to the present discipline of the Church, the penance is generally some short prayer, imposed rather as a sign of willingness to accept punishment, than as being any real punishment in itself.

The very first idea of all religion is that of responsibility : that we, as God’s creatures, are responsible to our Creator for all our deeds, and are to look to Him for reward or punishment, according as they are good or bad. “He that cometh to God must believe that He is, and is a rewarder to them that seek Him” (Heb. xi. 6). “I have inclined my heart to do thy justifications for ever, for the reward” (Ps. cxviii. 112). The solemn warning which man received from the very time of his creation is given to us in these words of Almighty God to Cain when he was tempted to his crime : “Why art thou angry, and



why has thy countenance fallen ? If thou do well, shalt thou not receive ?—but if ill, shall not sin forthwith be present at the door ? But the lust thereof shall be under thee, and thou shalt have dominion over it ” (Gen. iv. 6). Present at the door ! If we could only think of the consequences of our sins as waiting for us, following our footsteps, always close to us, and not to be put off until in some way or other they are fully satisfied, we should commit very few sins.

Almost the first idea we have of Almighty God is that of the just Judge who will allow nothing to pass unrewarded or unpunished : “ The Most High is a patient rewarder ” (Ecclus x. 4). We find this truth put before us in almost every page of thy Holy Scripture. “ He that seeth into the heart, He understandeth, and nothing deceiveth the Keeper of thy soul, and He shall render to a man according to his works ” (Prov. xxiv. 12) ; again, in the Psalms we find : “ God hath spoken once, these two things have I heard, that power belongeth to God, and mercy to thee, O Lord, for Thou wilt render to every man according to his works ” (Ps. lxi. 12). “ For mercy and wrath are with Him. He is mighty to forgive and to pour out indignation : according as His mercy is, so His correction judgeth a man according to his works. The sinner shall not escape in his rapines, and the patience of Him that sheweth mercy shall not be put off ” (Ecclus. xvi. 12).

In the New Testament we have the same fundamental truth constantly before us : “ According to thy hardness and impenitent heart thou treasurest up to thyself wrath, against the day of wrath and revelation of the just judgment of God, who will render to every man according to his works ” (Rom. ii. 5). “ Be not deceived ; God is not mocked. For what things a man shall sow, those also shall he reap. For he that soweth in his flesh, of the flesh also shall reap corruption ; but he that soweth in the spirit, of the spirit shall reap life everlasting ” (Gal. vi. 7). “ For the wages of sin is death ” (Rom. vi. 22). The New Testament almost concludes with the same truth in our Lord’s own words : “ Behold, I come quickly, and

my reward is with me, to render to every man according to his works" (Apoc. xxii. 12).

It is very good for us, my dear brethren, to dwell frequently upon these solemn warnings, that we may not lose sight of our responsibilities. Our natural inclination is to put our sins out of sight as soon as possible, and to deceive us ourselves by fancying that, because we have forgotten them, we shall no longer be held accountable for them. The Lord is a "patient rewarder," and all the evil we do has to be accounted for in some way. It has become a debt which we owe to His justice, and, in some way or other, it must be satisfied. Our Lord Himself is constantly comparing sin to a debt which we owe to God: "One was brought to him that owed him ten thousand talents" (St. Matt. xviii. 24). "A certain creditor had two debtors, the one owed him five hundred pence, and the other fifty" (St. Luke vii. 41); and in His own prayer He teaches us to say: "Forgive us our *debts*, as we also forgive our debtors."

If men would only look upon their sins as debts which they would certainly have to pay, some day or other, they would not be so careless in contracting them. Every sin, great or small, that men commit increases the reckoning that is against them. "Are not these things stored up with me, and sealed up in my treasures? Revenge is mine, and I will repay them in due time, that their foot may slide: the day of destruction is at hand, and the time makes haste to come" (Deut. xxxii. 34).

We see, moreover, that Almighty God regards sin as a debt to His justice, to be satisfied in some way or other, not only when the sinners are His enemies, but also when they are His friends. Moses and David were both very high in the favour of God, and specially privileged; they were both men "according to God's own heart." When they sinned, however, Almighty God acted by them as by all others, and, in spite of the high favour in which they stood, they had to pay the penalty of their transgression. "And when Moses had lifted up his hand and struck the rock twice with the rod, there came forth water in great abundance, so that the people and their cattle drank. And

the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, Because you have not believed me, to sanctify me before the children of Israel, you shall not bring these people into the land which I will give them " (Num. xx. 11). Although Moses lived and died in the friendship of God, yet his transgression and unbelief were punished, and he was deprived of his greatest earthly reward—the honour of leading God's people into the promised land.

Almighty God acted in the same way by King David when he had sinned by his vanity in numbering his people. "David said to the Lord, I have sinned very much in what I have done, but I pray Thee, O Lord, to take away the iniquity of Thy servant, because I have done exceeding foolishly. And David arose in the morning, and the word of the Lord came to Gad the Prophet and the seer of David, saying, Go and say to David. Then saith the Lord, I give thee thy choice of three things—choose one of them, which thou wilt, that I may do it to thee. Either seven years of famine shall come to thee in thy land, or thou shalt flee before thine adversaries, or for three days there shall be a pestilence in thy land " (2 Kings xxiv. 10).

In these instances, and a thousand others, are exemplified the great truth that God is not a "respector of persons." "Thou dost not regard the person of man." In all men alike does God hate sin—whether in the elect or in the reprobate, in saint or in sinner. He cannot endure iniquity, and will most certainly punish it. It does not matter how high may be the position in which the sinner is placed, or how necessary he may appear to be in the eyes of men ; God will not endure iniquity or allow it to remain unpunished.

There is nothing which puts so vividly before us the necessity of satisfying the justice of God, which is offended by sin, as the great mystery of our redemption. Rather than allow the claims of His justice to remain unsatisfied, Almighty God, in His infinite wisdom, was pleased Himself to supply that Satisfaction which His creatures could not give. and, to accomplish this, He took upon Himself our human nature, and died upon the

cross for us. He might, if He had so willed, simply have cancelled the debt, but, instead of doing so, He worked this great miracle of love in order to enable us to pay it. We cannot, then, wonder that in all His dealings with His creatures He should insist upon due Satisfaction being made in some way or other.

He has taken upon Himself that part of the debt which man was unable to pay. He has blotted out "the handwriting of the decree that was against us, which was contrary to us, and He has taken the same out of the way, fastening it to the cross" (Colos. ii. 14).

He has, moreover, given us the power to make payment for ourselves, by giving to all our actions a value derived from His own sacred merits. All that men could do of their unassisted power would be insufficient to make any Satisfaction, but He has given a supernatural efficacy to what we do in Him and with Him, so that we are able, by His grace, to make a real and true Satisfaction for the sins by which His justice has been outraged.

Our Lord, therefore, expects us to co-operate with Him, and to make use of the means of atonement which He has put into our hands. If He is to bear His cross, He expects us also to take up the cross and follow Him. "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me" (St. Matt. xvi. 24). Why should men take up the cross?—why should they share in His suffering? Not because He delights in our suffering, not because what He has done is not sufficient to atone for sin, but because justice requires that men should, themselves, do something to pay that great debt which is due to the justice of Almighty God. Therefore it is that St. Paul says: "I rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up those things that are wanting of the sufferings of Christ, in my flesh, for his body, which is the Church" (Col. i. 24). He does not mean that the sufferings of Christ were insufficient in themselves, but that what was wanting was the co-operation of men—that men should take up their cross and follow our Lord in making atonement for sin.

When sin is remitted, a debt of punishment may still



remain, which we ourselves have still to pay. Our Lord has done His part, and we must do ours. The Council of Trent declares that "it is wholly false, and foreign from the word of God, that the guilt of sin is *never* remitted by God without the whole punishment being also pardoned . . . and truly the nature of Divine justice seems to demand that they who, through ignorance, have sinned before Baptism, should be received into favour in a different manner from those who, having been once freed from the servitude of sin and the devil, and having received the gift of the Holy Ghost, have not feared knowingly to violate the temple of God, and to grieve the Holy Spirit. . . . But the Satisfaction which we make for our sins is not so ours, that it be not through Jesus Christ; for we, who can do nothing of ourselves, as of ourselves, can do all things, He co-operating who strengthens us" (Sess. 14, ch. vii.).

If we turn once more to the history of King David, we have the plainest possible example of the Satisfaction which is required by the justice of God, even when the sin has been distinctly forgiven. He had committed a great crime in contriving the death of Urias, and a prophet was sent to reprove him, and, "David said to Nathan, I have sinned against the Lord. And Nathan said to David, The Lord also hath taken away thy sin; thou shalt not die. Nevertheless, because thou hast given occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, for this thing the child that is born to thee shall surely die" (2 Kings xii. 13). God had forgiven him his sin, and yet He punished him by the immediate loss of the child he loved, and afterwards by the rebellion and crimes of his own son.

We find the same throughout the whole of the Jewish Law: whenever sin was remitted, some sacrifice was always required as an "offering for sin." In this way our Lord's Great Sacrifice—the only true means of forgiveness—was represented, and something was done by the sinner to join in that reparation. St. Paul, therefore, says, "And without the shedding of blood there is no remission" (Hebrew xii. 22).

By every sin, then, which men commit they incur a debt to the justice of God. The guilt of sin cannot be pardoned without a true contrition and change of heart; and, even when the guilt has been remitted, a Satisfaction is due to the injured Majesty of God, which must be paid in one way or another. We will now, therefore, consider the different ways in which Satisfaction may be made.

The Satisfaction, which justice naturally requires, is the punishment of the offender, either in this life or in the life to come; but the mercy of God has provided many other ways in which we may make atonement. In the first place, God is mercifully satisfied by an atonement offered for us. Nothing that man could suffer or do would be a sufficient reparation; no sacrifice that he could offer would avail; therefore, the Almighty has Himself offered a Sacrifice for us, and His justice accepts the reparation as if it were ours. "Burnt-offering and sin-offering Thou didst not require: then said I, Behold I come" (Ps. xxxix. 7). In the same way, Almighty God allows us to offer up Satisfaction for our brethren, and, to some extent, at any rate, accepts it as if from them. We have seen, for instance, how St. Paul "rejoiced in his sufferings to fill up those things that were wanting for the Church"—that is, for his brethren.

We have abundant instances in the Old Law of the same thing—that is, that Almighty God was pleased to receive the prayers and offerings of His faithful servants as a Satisfaction for sinners. When the children of Israel had grievously offended, and God sent fire to destroy them, we read that Aaron put incense into his censer, and, running to the midst of the multitude which the burning fire was now destroying, he offered the incense; and, standing between the dead and the living, he prayed for the people, and the plague ceased" (Num. xvi. 47). As it said in the Psalm: "And He said that He would destroy them: had not Moses, His chosen one, stood before Him in the breach, to turn away His wrath lest He should destroy them" (Ps. cv. 23). So, in the New Law, our Lord will receive our prayers for our brethren,

and the sacrifices we make on their behalf, in some part, at any rate, as a Satisfaction for the debt which they owe to His justice.

There are, besides, many kinds of good works which God will allow to supply the place of the punishment due to our sins. To begin with, our Lord dwells strongly on the efficacy of prayer. We owe a great debt to God, and we can obtain the forgiveness of the debt by earnest prayer. "And that servant, falling down, besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all : and the lord of the servant, being moved with pity, let him go, and forgave him the debt. . . . Thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all the debt, because thou besoughtest me" (St. Matt. xviii. 26—32).

Prayer first puts us in dispositions in which we may obtain the remission of guilt, and be restored to the favour of God, and then it is able, in a great measure, to pay the debt which our sins have left owing. "By prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your petitions be made known to God."

However great may be the debt that we owe, our Lord will allow us to pay it by fervent prayer.

Again : Almighty God constantly refers us to almsgiving as a most powerful means of paying our own debts. What can be stronger than the words of the Archangel Raphael, which are recorded in the history of Tobias : "Prayer is good with fasting and alms, more than to lay up treasures of gold : for alms delivereth from death, and the same is that which purgeth away sins, and maketh to find mercy and life everlasting. . . . When thou didst pray with tears, and didst bury the dead, and didst leave thy dinner, and hide the dead by day in thy house, and bury them by night, I offered thy prayer to the Lord" (Tob. xii. 8). In the same spirit is the advice given by the Prophet Daniel : "Wherefore, O King, let my counsel be acceptable to thee, and redeem thou thy sins with alms and thy iniquities with works of mercy to the poor : perhaps He will forgive thy offences" (Dan. iv. 24).

The same is the teaching of our Lord in the New Testament. Our Lord accepts even the smallest thing done in

His name to one of our brethren as something done immediately for Him, and consequently of great value : “ Whosoever shall give to drink, to one of these little ones, a cup of cold water only, in the name of a disciple, Amen, I say to you, he shall not lose his reward ” (St. Matt. x. 41). He continues the lesson that had been given by His servants before, that “ alms purge away sin and maketh to find mercy ; ” “ But yet that which remaineth, give alms ; and behold, all things are clean unto you ” (St. Luke xi. 41). And St. Peter sums up the lesson in the beautiful words which are so familiar to us : “ Before all things, have a constant mutual charity among yourselves, for charity covereth a multitude of sins ” (1 St. Peter iv. 8).

The best of all ways, however, in which men may pay the debt which they owe on account of their sin, is by ardent love of God. Charity not only obtains for us the forgiveness of sin, but also satisfies the claims of justice. “ Many sins are forgiven her, because she hath loved much ” (St. Luke vii. 47). The martyrs who have laid down their lives for God, paid at once the whole debt due for former transgressions, because the act of martyrdom is the highest act of love which man can perform. “ Greater love than this no man hath, that a man lay down his life for his friends ” (St. John xv. 13). In the same way the supreme act of faith and charity which caused the penitent thief to make his confession on the cross, obtained for him a full and complete pardon for all past offences, so that our Lord made to him the gracious promise : “ This day thou shalt be with me in paradise.” Charity is like a furnace which, when it is thoroughly heated, consumes everything : it is incompatible with the guilt of sin, and destroys it, and when grace is restored to the soul, an ardent charity has power to pay all the debts that may still be due.

Besides all these different ways in which men may pay their debt to God, our Lord has left to His Church to assist them in their endeavours, He gave to His apostles the most unrestricted power of forgiving, not only sin, but the punishment of sin. “ What you shall



loose upon earth, shall be loosed also in heaven" (St. Matt. xviii. 18). His Church was to represent on earth both His justice and His mercy, and therefore had two offices to perform. One of these was to punish the sinner in God's name, by requiring at least so much Satisfaction for the sins committed as should be salutary for the sinner and edifying for the community. The other was to facilitate the payment of the debt which remained due by sinners—to make terms, if we may say so, on which sinners might be released from their liabilities in the speediest and easiest way possible.

In the early Church it was considered desirable to insist upon a very severe penitential discipline. It was not enough for sinners simply to repent of their sins and ask pardon—they had to undergo long penances and great austerities before they could be reinstated in their privileges as Christians. The writings of the Fathers of the Church in the early ages tell us how severe was the Satisfaction asked of sinners.

"Dost thou, therefore, think," says a writer of the first century, "that their offences, who do penitence, are immediately blotted out? No, they are not presently; but it is necessary that he who does penitence afflict his soul, and show himself humble in spirit in all his affairs, and undergo many and divers vexations; and, when he shall have suffered all things which were appointed for him, then, perhaps, He that made him and formed all things will be moved with compassion towards him, and afford him some remedy" (Hermas, "Faith of Catholics," vol. iii. p. 117). I will quote a passage from St. Cyprian, which may be taken as an illustration of the penitential practices of his time. He says: "As we have sinned greatly, let us weep greatly. To a deep wound let not a diligent and long course of medicine be wanting. Let not the penitence be less than the crime. Thinkest thou that the Lord can be quickly appeased when thou hast, with perfidious words, denied Him? . . . Men must pray and entreat more earnestly, pass the day in grief, spend nights in vigils and tears, employ their whole time in sorrowing lamentations, lie stretched on the ground,

prostrate themselves amongst ashes, sackcloth, and dust : after Christ's raiment lost, wish for no other clothing ; after the devil's food, of choice must fast ; apply themselves to just works, whereby sins are purged away ; give abundant alms, whereby souls are freed from death. . . . God can show indulgence ; He can turn aside His sentence. To the man who is penitent, who does good works, who entreats, He can graciously give pardon. He can impute whatever, for such, martyrs may pray and priests perform" (St. Cyprian, "Faith of Catholics," vol. iii. p. 121).

Those who had committed great crime were obliged to submit to severe public penance ; and were not allowed to enter the church till they had done the penance assigned to them. We have a striking example of this in the life of St. Ambrose, who was Archbishop of Milan in the fourth century. The Emperor Theodosius had committed a great crime by ordering a massacre at Thessalonica, in punishment of a sedition that had taken place there. Great cruelty was shown by the soldiers, and many innocent people were put to death. Theodosius was at that time the greatest and most powerful monarch on earth, and yet, when he presented himself at the church, St. Ambrose went out to meet him and forbade him to enter. "It seems, Sir," he said, "that you do not rightly apprehend the enormity of the massacre lately committed. Let not the splendour of your purple robes hinder you from being acquainted with the infirmities of that body which they cover. You are of the same mould with those subjects whom you govern. Depart, therefore, and attempt not, by a second offence, to aggravate your former crime : but quietly take the yoke upon you which the Lord hath appointed for you. It is sharp, but it is medicinal and conducive to your health." The prince, by way of extenuation, said that David had sinned, to which St. Ambrose answered : "You have followed him in his crime, follow him also in his repentance." Theodosius submitted and accepted the penance which the Church prescribed. He retired to his palace and spent eight months in mourning, clad in penitential garments. (Butler's "Lives of the Saints").

The object of the penance imposed in confession, is to

remind us of the debt which we owe, and to make us, as it were, acknowledge the liability. It is not, for a moment, supposed that such a slight punishment is sufficient to satisfy the justice of God; and the Church is constantly exhorting us to pay the debt which we owe, by works of penance; by patience under the trials which Providence sends us; by prayer and almsdeeds, and, above all, by love and devotion. The days of fasting and abstinence which are commanded have the same object in view, that we may satisfy God for our sins.

In order to help us to discharge our debt, the Church makes use of her power of loosing from the effects of sin by granting indulgences. These indulgences are a remission of the whole or part of the temporal punishment due to sins, which is granted in consideration of some good work which we do in order to satisfy the justice of God. Indulgences are granted at certain seasons, and in honour of certain feasts, and are, besides, given to those who perform certain acts of piety. To gain them, the first thing necessary is to be truly penitent, so that the guilt of the sin shall have first been pardoned. For this reason a good Confession and Communion are almost always part of the conditions of an indulgence.

And if we do not pay this debt? If we neglect all the means which God has provided for us? "The night cometh when no man can work," and God will reserve the punishment for that prison of purgatory, in which He acts, not, as now, in the character of a loving Saviour and Advocate, but as a severe and inexorable Judge. The holy souls in purgatory, who are now slowly paying the debt due on account of their sins, could tell us how fearful a thing is the justice of God even on those He loves. "Be at agreement with thy adversary betimes, whilst thou art in the way with him, lest, perhaps, the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison. Amen I say to thee, thou shalt not go out from thence till thou repay the last farthing" (St. Matt. v. 25).

# Catholic Sermons

BY REV. J. B. BAGSHAWE.

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## SERMON XLVII.

BY REV. A. B. GURDON.

### *The Particular Judgment.*

“But after a long time the lord of those servants came and reckoned with them” (St. Matt. xxv. 19).

THE words of Jesus Christ, dear brethren, apply to all times. “Heaven and earth shall pass away;” but the words of the Word of God shall not pass away. The parable from which my text is taken refers, as you know, to a lord who left a certain property with his servants, and went into a far country. The servants were to improve the property in his absence, and after a long time he came back and reckoned with them. The lord in the parable is our Lord Jesus Christ—we are the servants; the opportunities of corresponding to God’s graces, whatever they may have been, are the talents; the return of the Lord is the hour of death; and the reckoning is the particular Judgment which takes place immediately after death.

Let us notice this expression “after a long time.” It would seem at first as if this application of the parable to death is hardly borne out by facts. Our Lord comes to some after a very short time. Many people die young. But this length of time is not determined by the estimation of others, but by the estimation of the person who dies. When we come to consider the subjects of the reckoning, and in what a small space of time a quantity of matter is comprised, we can quite understand that the shortest life, after we have arrived at the use of reason, would appear a long time when viewed in the light of its responsibilities. Besides, to the young, a year, or even a month, seems a very long time. It is only in the lapse of years that time seems to fly so rapidly. And now, let us for a few moments examine the word



“reckoning.” We live in a commercial country, and, as you know, in all our large towns there are houses of business of various kinds; every evening the books which are in use are carefully balanced—the smallest items have to be accounted for—no mistake, however trivial, is allowed to pass. I have been told that the clerks in these large houses of business have sometimes been kept up half the night to disentangle or discover some error which had crept into the books, and involving a difference only of a few pence, and yet all this trouble is necessary; for if once inaccuracy were allowed, a great principle would be surrendered, and room for graver blunders, or even frauds, would be made.

Now, if all this care is taken by men when they are in earnest regarding their temporal interests, how much more accurate, we may be sure, will those dread accounts be in which an all-seeing and all-remembering God is engaged! “For a thousand years in His sight are as yesterday, which is past.” This, then, dear brethren, is the truth which we have to consider. Immediately after we are dead, each one of us will have to be “reckoned with” by our Judge. This is called the “Particular Judgment,” because it is particular or personal. On the great day of the General Judgment all the men and women who have ever lived will be judged publicly—the secrets of every heart will then be revealed one to another; but in this Particular Judgment our merits and demerits will be treated of individually and alone, and our fate decided for all eternity. I do not mean, therefore, to put before you an imaginary scene, about which the Church has told us nothing. I will say nothing about the circumstances, the place, the pageant, the assessors, the accusers, the intercessors. I will confine your attention to what is *of faith*. “After death the Judgment.” What, then, will be the subject of this reckoning? First of all, *the evil things committed*, and, among these evil things, primarily *evil deeds*. Yes, all the sins of action against God’s law, great or small, with all their circumstances, *just as they were*—all these will be definitely, accurately, (not one forgotten or slurred over) weighed

and judged. The sins of youth, the sins of middle life, the sins of old age, will be unravelled one by one, and against each of these is either a receipt or a blank.

What do we call this receipt? Absolution. Every sin goes to Judgment—absolved or unabsolved. Deluded Protestants, as we know, talk of “feeling that they are justified,” “being sure that they are forgiven,” &c.; in other words, *they sign their own receipt for their own debt*, and we are filled with astonishment and compassion for them. But do not we Catholics have unreceipted sins, too, sometimes? We are not so foolish, perhaps, as to cancel our own debts, and think it is all right; but, after all, are we much wiser when we go on with a whole heap of unreceipted bills in our pocket, *and we know that the reckoning must come sooner or later?*

Perhaps we are in the habit of going to Confession very seldom. How many sins we thus forget when at last we do go! Think of the numbers of people we meet, the thousands of actions that are crowded into one week of our lives, and then estimate how few of these can be brought to our memory after the lapse of six months, or, perhaps, years. And by going seldom to the Sacraments we get out of the habit of examining our consciences, so that, even when we do present ourselves, we leave out half we have come to say, because the books of our soul are in such confusion that we do not know what date or item to go back to; *and yet these books will all be balanced at the Judgment*—the day of reckoning.

Some of you, perhaps, may say, “Well, but God is very merciful and considerate, and will not hold us guilty for sins we have forgotten.”

This is very true; God *is* merciful and considerate, and, do what we will, some sins, owing to human infirmity, will slip our memory. The only question is, *Why* have we forgotten those sins? Is it from sloth, or something faulty on our parts? If we have really done our best to go into our consciences when we approach the Sacraments—if we are in the habit of examining ourselves every evening when we say our night prayers—then we may have full confidence in the goodness and

mercy of God, and feel that He will not hold us guilty for what we cannot remember. But have we done all this? There are some Catholics who keep no accounts with God at all. The whole thing is chance and haphazard. They trust to the priest to ask them questions which they have not taken the trouble to ask themselves, or, still worse, they see that if they went thoroughly into their own lives, they would open out abysses of sin it is very inconvenient to expose, and so they make a false conscience to themselves. They say, "They are only little sins, it is not worth while troubling ourselves about them," and then they shut the door of inquiry upon their hearts, and go on as before.

And yet once more, dear brethren, every action, as it was on the conscience before we tampered with it, will appear at the reckoning.

Let us now turn to another class of evil things—*our words*. Our Lord says "that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall render an account for it in the day of judgment" (St. Matt. xii. 36). If this be true of *idle* words, what of *wicked* words? Perhaps there is no subject that will astonish us at the reckoning so much as the number of our bad words. It was this thought, dear brethren, that drove so many saints of old into the desert, to live apart from men all their lives. The peculiar danger of bad words lies in the fact that, when once we have uttered them, they are beyond our control—scandalous words, which long afterwards may cause another to sin; words of calumny or detraction, which we have set going, and cannot stop. And every one of these words has gone before us to the great reckoning. No wonder that holy David prays to God to guard his words. "Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth: and a door round about my lips" (Ps. cxl. 3). And what shall we say of the vast region of the *thoughts*? How far outreaching it is! What myriads of thoughts crowd into our souls—good, bad, or indifferent—in the course of a single day! And yet each one of them may be fraught with endless life or endless death! God is *within* us, dear brethren, as well as without us, and reads



every one of these thoughts—notes them, and will reckon with us about them at the Judgment. There are many people who take no notice at all of their thoughts—who give way to impure imaginations, or dreams of malice and revenge, and that for days and weeks together, and yet never think of the terrible fact that every one of these thoughts, with all their circumstances, will have to be accounted for.

The second great class of matter for the reckoning consists of *omissions*.

In the parable from which my text is taken you will recollect that one of the servants hid his Lord's talent in the earth. He did not lose it nor sell it; he brought it back when his Lord came to the reckoning. He simply had not traded with it and increased it, as the others had done, and for this he was judged and sentenced. Have we ever seriously thought of this?

As our Catechism tells us, we are simply created by God in order to “know Him, love Him, and serve Him in this world, and to be happy with Him for ever in the next.”

We all, then, have this talent of *time*, to say nothing of other talents to which I shall shortly call your attention; and, as the years roll over us, God expects this talent of time to be improved by us in the shape of good works. How far has this talent been improved by us hitherto? What advance have we made in the “love and service” of God this year, as compared with last year? I once spoke to a person who was doing *nothing* for God, and who was burying this talent in the earth, on the state of his soul, and his answer was: “*Faith, I do no harm to any one!*” My dear brethren, we are not sent on earth to do no harm, but to do a great deal of good. Well, now, *what* good have we done? The wicked servant in the parable had done “no harm.” There was his talent dug out of the earth, fresh and shining as when His Lord first gave it to him. But where was the interest this talent ought to have produced? It was not forthcoming. He had done this harm. He had missed the end for which he was created. But this is not the only talent



God has given us. We Catholics have also the talent of *Faith*. How have we traded with it? What supernatural blossoms of devotion have been seen in our souls as the result of this root of faith? There is no good in a man saying "I am a Catholic," because that depends more upon God than upon himself. What has he done in consequence of his being a Catholic? And with this faith there is also the gift of *knowledge*—one of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit implanted in our souls in Baptism. How much better do we *know* God in consequence of this? There are hundreds of Catholics in this country who know nothing about God, or their religion, because they do not choose to do so. They have buried this talent in the earth. They have profited by worldly experience; they have increased in their knowledge of sensible things: they know the difference between a florin and half a crown; they are not bad judges of meat or vegetables; they cannot be taken in as they were when they were children; but in the knowledge of God they are just like children. Perhaps they do not know so much as when they were children—when they left school, for instance. Now, all these omissions will have to be reckoned about directly we die. Again, what a number of external graces a Catholic receives, and he omits to correspond to them. Look at the number of churches open to all, with the Blessed Sacrament to pray to—the number of Masses—the number of Benedictions—the number of sermons we are invited to hear. How have we traded with these graces? Again, the numerous confessionals attended at the times most convenient for us—all open—without money and without price. Do you suppose God forgets these graces? Oh! no—as each one dies, the circumstances of his life will be unfolded—where he lived—how near a church—what appliances and means of grace were at hand—all will be unravelled at the reckoning!

Then, once more, the numerous calls from God through a priest, or good friends. Do you suppose, dear brethren, these graces are accidental? *God watches every visit of a priest*. He hears those conversations, alas! so com-

mon amongst us, when a priest is going his rounds. "My child, you have not been to your duties for a long time," or "You have not sent your child to school, it is learning nothing but what is bad in the streets;" and the answer, "Oh, yes, Father, I will be up with you on Saturday night;" and "the child shall go to school to-morrow;" and when Saturday evening arrives, nothing comes of the priest's visit; a neighbour drops in—the promise is forgotten—the child is not sent to school; it is all as it was before—all—except one thing—the whole transaction was put down in God's book for the day of reckoning.

And then what countless *internal* graces we receive! The pricks of conscience, which make us feel so uncomfortable sometimes—the inspirations to break off some habit or avoid some occasion of sin—the thoughts that come across us, we know not how, to lead a better life than we are leading—all these are corresponded to or rejected; and each one of these graces has to be accounted for. And here another thought occurs to us. *We are all judged alone.* What folly, then, to take refuge in numbers, or custom, or the soft consent of an ill-informed friend, or even what our director has told us, when we have made our own story to him, if, all the time, deep within, unknown to others, but well known to us, is God's small voice speaking the truth which will not be hushed? No one can answer for another's grace. We must each of us answer for our own grace, when we stand alone on the shore of eternity, and alone are reckoned with by the Judge.

Think, again, of another subject-matter for the dread account of the Particular Judgment—the *good we have done badly.* Yes; it is a very common thing to do good actions, and yet sin by the way we have done them. For instance, prayer is a good action; but if, at the time of prayer, we are giving way to wilful distractions, we offend God instead of pleasing Him. So, too, with regard to the very reception of the Sacraments. It is a good thing to go to Confession, and a good thing to go to Holy Communion; but, if we go to Confession for no pur-

pose but to make our confessor, or pious friends, think well of us ; and if we go to Holy Communion simply out of jealousy, and because some one else is going, we do good things badly, and these also will be reckoned about. It is very frightening, dear brethren, to think of the many good actions that are vitiated by us in this or similar ways, and what an alloy there is, if we only examine it, in our most sacred performances. It is often one-third for God and two-thirds for ourselves.

There is another kind of special grace, too, which we must not forget—it is the grace of affliction. Do you remember what St. Paul says to his Galatian converts ? “Have you suffered so great things in vain?” So it appears that even our crosses may do us harm if we bear them badly. Christ suffered that He might be like us, but we may suffer, and not be at all like Christ. We read of some in the Old Testament that were the worse, not the better, for pain. King Asa, we are told, in his old age, was diseased in his feet till his disease was exceeding great, yet in his disease he sought not the Lord. And of King Achaz it is written : “Moreover, also in the time of his distress he increased contempt against the Lord.” Take care that it be not said of you, “This is that man, or that woman, whom God sought to bring to holiness, who was afflicted that he might see how vain every thing in this world was ; who had pain that he might learn to look forward to that world where there is no more pain ; who knew that he could not have much longer to live, and yet clung to this life as if it were his all in all ; who had tribulation enough here, but it did not make him fit for eternal happiness hereafter.” This is the most miserable of all states—to lose this world, and not to gain the next ; to be unable to have the pleasures of one, such as they are, and yet not to attain to the pleasures which are at God’s right hand for evermore. Look at Lazarus who was laid at the rich man’s gate, full of sores, and desiring to be fed with the crumbs that fell from his table ; if, when he died, he had been in hell, lifting up his eyes in torments, how wretched would he have been ! Do not deceive yourselves. It is not because Lazarus



was poor, and full of sores, that he was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom. It was because his poverty and his sores made him a true servant of Him who was wounded and bruised for us. You may be as poor as Lazarus here, and yet have your portion with the rich man hereafter, just as our own St. Edward had his portion with the rich man here, and yet now rests, like Lazarus, in paradise. Remember, dear brethren, that for all our sufferings God will bring us into Judgment. He sent them to us to bring us nearer to Himself, and He will inquire at the reckoning whether they did bring us to Himself or not. If not, far from being better off because we had them, we shall be worse off. They were means of grace, and we did not benefit by them; they were talents, and we did not improve them. God sent them all for His loving purposes, and they will all have to be reckoned about. Let us for a few moments turn to another thought—the awful sanctity of the Judge. Sometimes, when we are reading the lives of the saints, we are struck with the immense difference between their estimate of sin and ours, and we are almost tempted to think their expressions of horror exaggerated; but how much more struck shall we be when we stand face to face with the infinite purity of God! Then we shall see that the “half was not told us”—that nothing was exaggerated—that God meant what He said—that the little sins we thought nothing of, look very weighty in the balance of the sanctuary. Oh, what a terrible surprise to those Catholics who never reflect, and who never have tried in life to look at things as God looks at them! And the sentence will be pronounced there and then—*an eternal sentence*. That sentence never can be rescinded. We are doomed to eternal joy or eternal misery. The accounts are balanced and closed for ever. The “handwriting against us” is either blotted out by the Precious Blood of Christ applied to the soul in life, or it remains, in damning characters, to fix our fate for ever!” Dear brethren, do these thoughts sadden you? They need not. You know I have only given you *one* side of the reckoning; now let us look at the other.



There is the credit side of the books as well as the debit. First of all, there are the *good works*—there are all those acts of obedience which a holy habit has made so familiar to us, that we have forgotten their existence ; but not one of them is forgotten by God. Do you remember that scene of Judgment which our Lord describes, in which the just are reminded by the Judge of the works of mercy they had performed. They had quite forgotten all about them, but He had not forgotten. “Then shall the King say to them that shall be on His right hand: Come, ye blessed of my Father, possess you the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry, and you gave me to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave me to drink; I was a stranger, and you took me in; naked, and you covered me; sick, and you visited me; I was in prison, and you came to me. Then shall the just answer Him, saying, Lord, when did we see Thee hungry, and fed Thee; thirsty, and gave Thee drink? And when did we see Thee a stranger, and took Thee in?—or naked, and covered Thee?—or when did we see Thee sick and in prison, and come to Thee? And the King, answering, shall say to them, Amen, I say to you, as long as you did it to one of these my least brethren, you did it to me” (St. Matt. xxv. 34—41).

And there are many other holy deeds, you know, besides the corporal works of mercy. As a saint has well observed: “If the just have forgotten those good actions which all the world recognizes and applauds, how much more those secret good works, which only the eye of God could see?” And then think of the multitude of *good words*. If scandal is such a terrible thing because we are not masters of the evil, and cannot resist its progress, how consoling is the thought of all those good words spoken in season, which came out of a good heart, and were almost immediately forgotten, and yet brought forth fruit in the souls of the hearers which we never knew, till God blessedly reminds us of them at the reckoning! And then that world of *thoughts*. If a depraved intention can vitiate the best action, what cannot a supernatural intention do for a merely indif-

ferent action? St. Paul tells us that even by eating and drinking we may further the glory of God, and, if we have the thought of God's presence ever before us, the commonest actions of our lives may be turned into the most meritorious good works, because we do them for the love of God. A spiritual writer calls this "minting money."

What shall I say, too, of that secret correspondence to grace, which none but the eye of God saw—whisperings of the Holy Spirit, which were caught up and acted upon, and the world knew it not—secret heroisms, in the avoidance of sin and its occasions, which have gone before to the Judgment, and are all recorded there? You may depend upon it, dear brethren, the life we lead in secret with God, in the depth of our souls, is a much more prolific one than that external life which everyone can see, and upon which we lay so much stress. If our hearts are right with God, what a consolation it is to think that He can read those hearts so accurately! Every daily cross faithfully taken up—every disappointment lovingly accepted—every "bitterness" cheerfully borne—is sent to the reckoning to swell the long list of precious things, when the Lord makes up His jewels.

And yet in this parable our Lord has not quite said all. He said He was like one who went a long way off—a long journey—and that is, indeed, true—so long that some people seem to think He will never come back again; but He did not say He would look in upon His servants, in the meantime, *in disguise*. And yet it is so. In our comings in and goings out the King is attentively watching our proceedings. He sees our fidelity and our betrayals; He knows those who are on His side and those who are against Him. More than this: He puts Himself in our power, and asks us to protect Him—to give Him a refuge. He "stands at the door" of our souls and "knocks." In the Holy Communion, in His graces, disguised as He is, the King asks for admittance from the cold world without—from the host of enemies who resist Him, ignore Him, would discrown Him if they could. In one of Shakespeare's most famous plays the

great poet depicts just such a scene. A king has made believe that he is going on a long journey for a long time, but he really has never left his kingdom. In disguise, he stays behind, and watches what takes place in his absence. To one he has delegated his authority, and he sees how it is abused. He hears how others speak of him ; he knows his friends and he knows his enemies ; and then suddenly, when no one is expecting him, he appears upon the scene and claims his own again. It is a most thrilling story ; but how far short it falls of the dread reality of the King of Heaven in disguise amongst us ? What have we done for the fugitive Prince ? Have we cherished His memory and longed for His return, and traded with His goods ? Have we been loyal to Him, in good report and evil report, and are our accounts always kept ready for the reckoning ?

Oh, what joy, dear brethren, to hear Him say, “ Well done, good and faithful servant ; because thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will place thee over many things : enter thou into the joy of thy Lord ” ! A few short years, and all this will be a reality to all who read these pages. After a long time the Lord will have come back to each of us, and will have reckoned with us. Ah ! well for the daily examination of conscience—the listening for the knock of grace—the ready lamp of personal love for the absent King, ever alight—for “ at midnight there was a cry made, Behold the bridegroom cometh : go ye forth to meet him . . . and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage, *and the door was shut.* ”

# Catholic Sermons

BY REV. J. B. BAGSHAWE.

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## SERMON XLVIII.

### *Confession in Practice.*

"I have thought upon my ways, and turned my feet unto Thy testimony" (Ps. cxviii. 59).

THE preparation for Confession involves "entering into oneself"—that is, thinking upon our past ways, in order to turn our feet to God's Commandments. As I said before, the first step of the prodigal son in his return to his father was to "return to himself" and think. Such consideration is needed, my brethren, that we may know our own sins, and the real state of our consciences before God. St. Paul says: "For what man knoweth the things of man, but the spirit of a man that is in him" (1 Cor. ii. 11). But the things that are within us are known even to our own spirit only by reflection, and there are many who live strangers to themselves and their own consciences. We need thought, moreover, that we may find out the path of improvement, and see what is needful in the way of perfection, that "I may know what is wanting to me" (Ps. xxxviii. 5); and still more that we may learn to grieve, as we should, over the offences we have committed. "My sorrow was renewed, my heart grew hot within me, and in my meditation a fire shall flame out" (Ps. xxxviii. 3).

I propose, to-day, to speak a little more practically about Confession, and especially about the preparation for it. The good fruit to be derived from the Sacrament of Penance depends so much on the dispositions with which men receive it, that we can hardly dwell too much on the importance of a careful preparation. Let us first, however, consider the necessity of *frequent* Confession. To make the sacrament of Penance answer its purpose, it is not enough to receive it well, but you must receive



it frequently—that is, sufficiently often for your spiritual necessities. The very idea of a remedy is, that it should be used when it is wanted, and if it is not applied when the necessity arises, it is of very little value.

There are a great many people who go to Confession as a matter of routine, at certain long intervals, but who do not seem to think much of using the Sacrament as a remedy which God has given to them as a means to a distinct end. It is impossible to lay down any fixed rule as to the frequency of Confession, because, obviously, all men have not the same need of it. Let each one decide honestly what his own spiritual state requires, and what will be good for him, and act upon that decision. People should, however, take care not to raise up unnecessary difficulties for themselves; it is, for instance, a foolish thing to choose a confessor who lives at such a distance as to make Confession a laborious and difficult undertaking. Everyone should accustom himself to go to the priest who happens to be within reach, if necessary, so that he may be able to get the spiritual assistance he needs without unreasonable difficulty. It is also a mistake to give too much time and labour to the preparation for Confession. It is, of course, impossible to make too careful a preparation; but it is very possible to have an exaggerated idea of the time and labour necessary, and so to put unnecessary difficulties in the way of receiving the Sacraments. You find people, for instance, who think themselves obliged to give a certain fixed time to preparation; to read through certain formal examinations and devotions, and, if they cannot find time for all their self-imposed formula, they will stay away from the Sacraments. There are quite difficulties enough, and people should take care not to put obstacles of their own making in the way of receiving the Sacraments.

The first part of a preparation is a good intention. Our Lord says: “The light of thy body is thy eye. If thy eye be single, thy whole body will be lightsome” (St. Matt. vi. 22). Now, the *eye* of a man’s acts is the intention with which he does them: by his intention he looks forward to some end, and the good or evil of this end

colours all that he does, and makes his act light or darkness. However excellent, and even heroic, human actions may appear to be, and may be in themselves, if they proceed from evil motives, they are simply evil, whilst the smallest thing that is done with a good intention is a good work.

To make a perfect work, however, it is not enough that it should proceed from a good intention: it must come, as far as possible, from a pure and unmixed intention, and also from an energetic intention. A great many things are done with an intention, which is good enough as far as it goes, but are done carelessly, and without any very strong purpose: we cannot expect such actions to have any great merit in the sight of God, since He looks principally to the intention.

Apply these principles to the preparation for Confession. Try to have a very pure and energetic intention in what you are doing. A great many people prepare themselves for the Sacraments, without stopping to ask themselves what is the object they propose to themselves—*why* they are going to Confession—and they would, perhaps, be surprised to find how much human respect, or mere routine, was influencing them. The real object they ought to have before them, by which alone they should wish to be influenced, is two-fold. In the first place, to make peace with God, “to flee from the wrath to come;” and, secondly, for the future, to obtain the grace of an amendment of their lives.

The sacrament of Penance has a double character: it is to be a shield and a sword. It is a shield, with which to shelter ourselves from the anger of God our sins have deserved; and, at the same time, a sword, enabling us to strike down our spiritual enemies, by overcoming evil habits, and by uprooting the interior dispositions likely to lead us into sin. Even if we are not conscious of any very grievous offences, we should still make use of the Sacrament in order to strike the enemy again and again. We read, for instance, of the assiduity with which great saints made use of sacramental Confession—not, as we may naturally suppose, because they had committed

many sins, but because they were determined completely to subdue the enemy.

There is a story in the Old Testament which we may take as an illustration of the frequent use of the sacraments of Penance and the Holy Eucharist. King Joas went to visit the prophet Eliseus, who was then sick of the illness of which he died. The prophet told him to bring a bow and arrows, and "he said to the King of Israel, Put thy hand upon the bow. And when he had put his hand, Eliseus put his hands over the king's hands, and said, Open the window to the east. And when he had opened it, Eliseus said, Shoot an arrow. And he shot. And Eliseus said, The arrow of the Lord's deliverance from Syria. . . . And he said, Strike with an arrow upon the ground. And he struck three times, and stood still. And the man of God was angry with him, and said, If thou hadst smitten five or six or seven times, thou hadst smitten Syria even to utter destruction; but now three times shalt thou smite it" (4 Kings xiii. 16). So Christians use the Sacraments and stand still; whereas, if they struck again and again, as the saints did, they would gain a complete victory over their spiritual enemies.

But it is not quite enough to have a right intention; we should endeavour, also, to have a very earnest and energetic intention, or, as we may say, to be very full of what we mean, and are going to do. A great many people have really excellent intentions if they were cross-questioned as to the objects they were aiming at, and had time to consider what their intentions were; but this is not quite enough. Let us see what was the sort of intention which brought the sick and the lepers to our Lord when they came to be healed. "Behold a man full of leprosy, who, seeing Jesus, and falling on his face, besought Him, saying, Lord, if Thou wilt Thou canst make me clean" (St. Luke v. 12); or, again, the two blind men who followed Him, "crying out and saying, Have mercy on us, O Son of David" (St. Matt. xi. 27). What sort of intention had these suppliants?

They and all the others who came to our Lord for temporal favours, knew thoroughly well what they meant and

wanted, and wanted it with all their hearts. It is just this sort of straightforward and energetic intention that we should take with us when we set to work to prepare for Confession.

We must not, however, rely too much on our own good intentions, but we must begin by asking God's help, or, as the Catechism tells us, "we must heartily pray for grace to make a good Confession;" for, as St. Paul says: "It is God who worketh in you both to will and to accomplish, according to His good will" (Phil. ii. 13). Our good intentions, therefore, must be perfected by earnest prayer, and strengthened by the grace of God, or they will prove insufficient. Our prayer ought to be for two things—for light to see and strength to act. Without Divine light, we cannot hope to get any adequate view of our own consciences. How should we? We are surrounded on all sides by false lights and false ideas, and are constantly liable to be misled by the prejudice of men and the suggestions of self-love; we want to put all these things aside, in order to judge fairly of our own conduct, and to do so we need the light of God's grace.

It is not enough to have light to see our own faults; we require also strength of will and determination to turn away from evil; and this earnest will we cannot expect unless God touches our hearts by His grace. Earnest prayer, therefore, is one of the great elements in a good Confession—indeed, as I have before said, fervent prayer is, as a rule, necessary for receiving all the Sacraments with profit.

I now come to the examination of conscience. On this all your preparation rests; it is the foundation on which your sorrow and purpose of amendment depend. You cannot have sorrow or purpose of amendment except in a general and vague way, unless you know pretty accurately what you are going to be sorry for. It is necessary, then, to make a good examination of conscience, because it is a serious work to be done for God; for this reason you are bound to do it well, and also because, as I have said, the reality of your sorrow and good resolutions depends a good deal on the accuracy of your



self-knowledge. It is not, however, necessary, as a general rule, to give any very long time to it; and those who are over-scrupulous in the part of their preparation very often allow it to interfere with what is still more important—that is, with their sorrow and purpose of amendment—or make it an excuse for keeping away from Confession.

Conscience is that light which God has placed within us, to guide us and to reprove us. It tells you what it is your duty to do when you are called upon to act, and you can never lawfully go against it; it tells you also when you have sinned. You do not need to ask anyone else, because your conscience is your own special judge, and you are “a law to yourselves.” Conscience is to us like the angel of God, of whom the Lord said to the Jews: “Behold, I will send my angel, who shall go before thee, and keep thee in thy journey, and bring thee into the place that I have prepared. Take notice of him, and hear his voice, and do not think him one to be condemned, for he will not let thee go when thou hast sinned” (Exod. xxiii. 20).

We have, then, to attend to the warnings of our own conscience, and also to listen to its reproaches afterwards. It will be an evil day for us if ever we silence those reproaches by perverting our own conscience. “Take heed, therefore, that the light which is in thee be not darkness” (St. Luke xi. 35). Conscience now too often utters its reproaches in a faint and timid way; but the day will come when it will be an unsparing accuser—when, as St. Paul tells us, men will “show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness to them, and their thoughts between themselves accusing, or also defending, one another, in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to the Gospel” (Rom. ii. 15). If we thought of the witness which our consciences will have to give against us in that terrible day, we should be a little more diligent and honest in asking what they have to say against us now.

“I have thought over my ways.” The life of man is a

varied and complicated scene: he has many paths to travel, and he has to make them all straight: he has many and various duties to do, and he must fail in none of them, and it is by doing them all that he is to "keep the Commandments." The shortest and simplest way of examining your conscience is by considering what your duties are, and how you do them. What do you owe to God, and how do you pay it? that is plainly the first question.

Without the spirit of obedience, every other service is a mockery. "Doth the Lord desire holocausts and victims, and not rather that the voice of the Lord should be obeyed, for obedience is better than sacrifice" (1 Kings xv. 22). We have, then, first to ask ourselves whether our lives are a habitual obedience to God, as far as we know His will. Do we make it our principle in every thing to say with the apostles: "We ought to obey God rather than man"? The ordinary way in which this obedience is shown is by carefully observing the laws made by the Church for God's service. These are, ordinarily speaking, the test of obedience; they are things which sometimes seem small in themselves, but have great importance, because they show, more than almost anything else, whether we will or not bend our own wills to the commands of God. There are, sometimes, great occasions on which we are called upon to show our obedience to God; but, in common life, obedience is generally shown by strictness in making your Easter Communion, by regularity in hearing Mass on Sundays, by fasting and abstaining on the appointed days, and by other things of the same kind.

Next to obedience comes service. You owe to God reasonable service. "I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercy of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, pleasing unto God, your reasonable service" (Rom. xii. 1). Let us consider what service we habitually offer to God: is it a reasonable service? Is it reasonable in the amount of our time which we habitually offer? Do we give thought enough, and trouble enough to allow us to call it a reasonable service? Take

the week through—take the day through, and ask yourself whether you are really giving your reasonable service.

Next to obedience and service comes reverence ; or, rather, reverence must be united to obedience and service, to make them worthy of the name. So necessary is the spirit of reverence, that Almighty God has, as we know, made it the subject of a distinct Commandment: “Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain.” We must take care, therefore, to ask ourselves whether we are reverent, not merely in actually using the Name of God, but in all the thousand ways in which reverence is shown—in thought, in speech, in behaviour; whether we are reverent in prayer, reverent in church, respectful to authority, and careful about all those things which belong to God’s service. All Christians ought to be much on their guard against the spirit of irreverence, and to try to detect it under all the many disguises which it sometimes assumes, for this spirit very easily destroys all religious feeling. “Deliver me not up to an irreverent and foolish mind” (Eccl. xxiii. 6) is a prayer which we have most of us an occasion to make.

Besides all this, we have to ask ourselves whether we are really trying to love God, since without love nothing else has any value. “Son, give me thy heart.” Our Lord Himself tells us that the “greatest and first Commandment” is to “love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole mind” (St. Matt. xxii. 37); and St. Paul adds: “If I should distribute all my goods to feed the poor, and deliver my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing” (1 Cor. xiii. 3). When we examine our consciences, we may well ask ourselves a few searching questions on this point: Do we really love God, and try to give Him our hearts? What is there in our lives which looks like it? May we not sometimes find a course of behaviour which has an appearance of systematic coldness and indifference? You find people, for instance, who seem overflowing with kindness and generosity, and almost enthusiasm, for everything else except Almighty God; but, when it is a question of His

service, they at once become cold and niggardly. Such a tone as this looks very little like love, and yet, perhaps, the consciences of many people do not reproach them much with the ungenerous, unloving tone of their whole lives.

I have spoken of our general duties to God at such length, because I think people sometimes fail in their self-examination, by not taking a sufficiently broad view of themselves and their conduct; they see the little things, but sometimes great and serious faults, which colour their whole lives, escape notice. In practice, however, it is very easy to see whether you are really serving God, or deserve the curse which the prophet utters in the words: "Cursed be he that doeth the work of the Lord fraudulently" (Jer. xlviii. 10). A very few practical questions will settle this. How often, and in what manner, do you receive the Sacraments? How do you sanctify the Sunday? How do you say your daily prayers? How do you speak of God and holy things? How do you keep the Commandments of the Church? The answers to these questions will tell you plainly enough how you are serving God.

Other duties to God, however, take up but a very small part of our lives. In one sense, of course, the whole of our lives belong to the service of God; everything we do ought ultimately to be directed to God and to be done for His service, and because it is His will, so that, to use our Blessed Lord's words, we may always "be about our Father's business." It is clear, however, that very much the larger part of our time is occupied in work which does not *directly* concern the service of God; we have to serve Him by doing the duty we owe to our neighbours. An examination of conscience must, therefore, go carefully into our dealings with our fellow-men in all the different ways in which we come in contact with them.

Our neighbours hold a number of different positions towards us, each of which brings with it its own duties and difficulties. We must, therefore, see how we conduct ourselves in each position. Our neighbours are either our equals or our inferiors, or they are the people



whom God has placed over us. "A certain lawyer, willing to justify himself, said to Jesus, And who is my neighbour?" (St. Luke x. 29). In the same way, we are occasionally inclined to justify ourselves by excluding portions of our fellow-creatures from our charity, as if they were not our neighbours. People are often kind enough to their equals, and, at the same time, forget that they owe any charity to those below them, or, perhaps—and I am not sure that it is not the more common case—they cannot bring themselves to remember that those who have authority over them, are their neighbours and brethren as well as their superiors. Sometimes, of course, it is the other way, and there are many who can be kind and good to all except their equals.

We must not be contented unless we are doing what is right by *all*, and therefore ought to make all the different relations of life subjects of self-examination. What we owe to all men, without exception, is justice and charity. Our duties to our neighbours are well summed up in St. Paul's words: "Render, therefore, to all men their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due: custom to whom custom: fear to whom fear: honour to whom honour. Owe no man anything but to love one another: for he that loveth his neighbour hath fulfilled the law" (Rom. xiii. 7).

Justice includes many things. Justice in money matters; or in those things which are equivalent to money, such as time, care, diligence. It also includes attention to the rights of others—both to the special rights of individuals, and to the general rights which all men possess. Under the first come the rights of employers, masters, customers, of the people with whom we have made contracts, or are associated in business, and of all who have any special claim on us. The second division takes in those duties which we owe to the community in which we live, and the right which all men have to expect assistance in need, sympathy, and, at any rate, fair dealing and truthfulness from all their brethren. To this we must add the right which men have to their character and good name—the right not to be

spoken of injuriously or unkindly by any one. These rights belong to strict justice, and we may well class the violation of some of them with injustice in money matters.

Duties to our neighbours require, however, something more than mere justice—they need charity also. We cannot do them as we ought unless we have something, at any rate, of that charity which comes from the love of God, of which St. Paul says: “Charity is patient, is kind; charity envieth not, dealeth not perversely, is not puffed up . . . beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things” (1 Cor. xiii. 4). It is not enough for us to be able to say that we are just to our neighbours, unless we can also say that we, at least, try to be kind to them. “Judgment without mercy to him that hath not done mercy; and mercy exalteth itself above judgment” (St. James ii. 13). We have, then, to consider what mercy—what real charity and kindness we show to others, since we shall certainly need mercy ourselves.

In thinking of duties to others, we have not to consider the question in general, but it is for each one to consider who are the neighbours with whom he comes in contact, and how he does his duties to them.

There is still left one important field for self-examination, and that is the consideration of those interior sins which do not immediately affect any one but ourselves. “From my hidden sins cleanse me, O Lord.” Our Lord says: “I am He that searcheth the reins and hearts” (Apoc. ii. 23); and He warns us specially not to become like whited sepulchres: “Wo to you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites: because you are like whited sepulchres, which outwardly appear to men beautiful, but within are full of dead men’s bones, and of all filthiness” (St. Matt. xxiii. 27). We should, indeed, be “whited sepulchres” if we examined into, and corrected, external faults only, and paid no attention to the secret sins of spiritual pride, of malice, and of impurity. “Create a clean heart in me, O God, and renew a right spirit within my bowels” (Ps. l. 12). All exterior excellence will be of

no avail before God, without purity of heart; and, therefore, our first care should be to watch over our own thoughts and imaginations, that our hearts may not be turned away to evil.

You have all many paths to tread, and you have in each of them to “make straight steps with your feet, that no one halting may go out of the way” (Heb. xii. 13). The Emperor’s confessor, it is related, once said to him: “Thou hast confessed the sins of Charles; tell me now those of the Emperor.” In the same way it is not enough for you to find out and confess the sins of the man. You must also confess the sins and shortcomings of the husband and of the father, of the lawyer and the tradesman, of the master and of the servant, if you would do your work thoroughly.

I have treated the subject of self-examination at some length, even at the risk of repeating a good deal, and, therefore, I must put off, till another time, the most important part of preparation for Confession—that is, the sorrow and good intentions which we are to have. I have said so much, because it is important for us all to take a fair and complete view of our duties and obligations, as the best means of discovering the sins we ought to confess. Such an examination need not take long. A very brief consideration of the chief duties you owe to God and to your neighbour, and to the custody of your own body and soul, will bring to your mind the sins of which you have been guilty.

I must conclude by exhorting you to remember that you are preparing an account for an all-seeing Lord, who will one day be your Judge. Forget that you have to make your acknowledgment to man, whose judgment of you is a small matter, and think only of laying your offences fully, honestly, and with humility of heart at the feet of our Lord Jesus Christ, that He may take up your burden, and may wash away your stains with His Precious Blood.

# Catholic Sermons

BY REV. J. B. BAGSHAWE.

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## SERMON XLIX.

### *The General Judgment.*

BY REV. A. B. GURDON.

"I saw a great white throne, and Him that sat upon it, from whose presence the earth and heaven fled away. . . And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and the books were opened, and the dead were judged by the things that were written in the books, according to their works" (Apoc. xx. 11—12).

AND we, dear brethren, shall see it, too! That tremendous pageant, which was disclosed in vision to the apostle, is to be an event in our lives. These very eyes of ours, which look upon the woods and trees, and green fields and blue skies, shall see, as really, the "great white throne," and the Judge, and all the splendour, the glory, the majesty of the greatest scene ever enacted on this earth.

A few weeks ago I called your attention to the consideration of the Particular Judgment; and, before we go any further, I think it might be well to explain the difference between that first Judgment which takes place immediately after we die, and this General Assize at which all will be summoned to appear—it may be millions of years hence, for "Of that day and hour no one knoweth—no, not the angels of heaven—but the Father alone." At the Particular Judgment it is our souls alone that appear before the Tribunal of Jesus Christ. We leave our bodies behind us. But at the General Judgment we are judged in our risen bodies; and this at once gives a peculiar significance and solemnity to the scene. One theologian of great name even suggests that the angels, who are not endowed with bodies naturally, will yet be clothed with bodily substances for the time, so that all rational creation will be seen by these bodily eyes of ours, and this vast multitude of



angels and men, good and bad—all that have ever lived, and that ever will live—from heaven—from hell—from purgatory—all without exception, from our Blessed Lady to the lowest demon in hell—all will be marshalled before the great white throne “to be judged by the things written in the books.”

And then again, in the Particular Judgment each soul is separately reckoned with and sentenced, while in the General Judgment this sentence is only promulgated in the hearing of all, and the matter of each life is revealed to all. Perhaps you will ask, What, then, is the object of the General Judgment? If all are doomed to heaven or hell immediately after death, why should there be a second Judgment? It is, dear brethren, on God’s account as well as on man’s. The Particular Judgment was intensely solitary—there God’s justice was vindicated in regard to the individual; but in the General Judgment His justice is vindicated in the face of all, “that thou mayest be justified in thy words, and mayest overcome when thou art judged” (Ps. l. 6). And so this day is emphatically called “The Lord’s day” in Scripture. “Sound an alarm in my holy mountain; let all the inhabitants of the land tremble: because the day of the Lord cometh, because it is nigh at hand. A day of darkness and of gloominess, a day of clouds and whirlwinds: a numerous and strong people as the morning spread upon the mountains. The like to it hath not been from the beginning, nor shall be after it, even to the years of generation and generation” (Joel. ii. 1, 2).

Hitherto, it has been man’s day. The triumphant world has been triumphant up to the last—God has been ousted from His own creation—His saints persecuted—His Church defied. Faith in Him will have dwindled to the lowest ebb; but now at last, like lightning from East to West, the beautiful pageant bursts upon the earth, and the archangel’s trumpet sounds the dawning of the “day of the Lord.”

And on man’s side, too, this great clearing up is necessary. Many and many an open enemy of Christ has passed away amid the plaudits of his generation. Their

names are handed down in honour—their sepulchres are made glorious; but now the true baseness of their lives will be revealed—they will be dishonoured before the whole world, and their names execrated by their own adherents, who now, for the first time, see them as they really were. On the other hand, many a poor servant of God, whom no one suspected of so much generosity, will have their glorious hidden deeds proclaimed before the universe, and all men will own them saints, and every eye be bent towards them in reverence and sympathy.

And if we examine the place which universal tradition has assigned to the Great Judgment, we shall see more light thrown on this “Day of the Lord.” The Prophet Joel long ago had said, “I will gather together all nations, and will bring them down into the valley of Josaphat;” and again, “Let them arise, and let the nations come up into the valley of Josaphat; for there I will sit to judge all nations round about” (Joel iii. 2—12). This valley of Josaphat lay between the city of Jerusalem and the Mount of Olives. It was the place consecrated by the sufferings of our Lord. It was across this valley, and the brook Cedron which ran through it, that our Lord passed on the last night of His life, when He went to the Mount of Olives to undergo His Agony. It had witnessed His prayers and His tears. It was here that He “drank of the brook by the way,” when apprehended, and, dashed down by His cruel guards, was led off to be tried by Annas, the High Priest. And the Mount of Olives hard by—how fitting a place for His Judgment Throne! There the angels, who appeared to the disciples after the Ascension, had said He would be seen again, and should come again, as He had been seen going into heaven. It is fitting that the scene of His Agony should be the scene of His triumph. Here He had “trodden the wine press alone,” and all had been done for His vineyard that could be done; and here all nations shall see, in the revealed stories of each life, His mercy, His long-suffering, and His justice. And here we may notice another characteristic of this Judgment. In the Particular Judgment, all was inquiry. Now there is no inquiry—

all that is at an end. It is the day of manifestation, not of inquiry. Saints have told us of the awful calm—the “silence, as it were, for the space of half an hour”—which will seize on all when the *Occupant of the throne takes His seat*. Cannot we imagine it, dear brethren? The immense concourse—some in the air, some on the ground, all in their risen bodies, all seeing and seen—the breathless expectation before the Judge speaks! And then the different feelings of each who are to be judged! “The thoughts accusing, or else defending, in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men” (Rom. ii. 15).

Here one will be saying “to the mountains and the rocks, Fall upon us and hide us from the face of Him that sitteth upon the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb” (Apoc. vi. 16). Here another, with wistful joy, will be looking on the face of Him he loved best on earth, and in whose society his blessed soul has been delighting for these many years in heaven. What different eyes, but all fixed upon One Object! “Every eye shall see Him.” Yes; there is the poor, despised Jesus, forgotten, insulted, crucified. They “that pierced Him,” not only at His crucifixion, but by their sins—all see Him for the first time together. Here is the one day He has waited for—the completion of all His dispensation—the day of the vindication of His Church’s teaching. And now the Judge is seated—the angels bear the signs of His Passion, now the banners of His glory; above all, there is the “sign of the Son of Man”—the holy cross, the salvation of many, alas! the stumbling-block of more. The Judge is seated, and the Judgment begins. The “dead, small and great,” take their places at the bar. Each single life is singly told in the hearing of all. The famous, the unknown, the truly great and small—the great and small in the world’s estimation, the great and small in their own estimation—all waiting for the result of this scrutiny, which will leave them great or small, in *everyone’s estimation*, for ever. When we think, dear brethren, of the immense multitude of injustices that have never been righted in this world, we may imagine the completeness of the



manifestations of this day. You know it is often urged as an argument against the Providence of God, by ungodly people, that the just are permitted to lie under unjust imputations, while the wicked are never found out by their fellow-men, and triumph to the last. They say, "What is the good of serving a God who does not protect you?"—"who allows the tongue of calumny to overcome innocence and truth?" And "even to the last" they say, "Wrong is made to look like right;" for the memory of the good is clouded for all time, while the graves of the wicked are respected from generation to generation.

Now we see that God has only been waiting to make the triumph of innocence more complete. If He had put forth His hand sooner, the cup of iniquity would not have been filled to the brim; *all* the strength of the guilty would not have been exhausted; but now He has permitted to sin and deceit their full liberty, and, with one tremendous blow, He shatters the powers of evil in the sight of all generations. There are no more graves, no more lying monuments, no more false public opinion. He waits till all are met for the truth to be told—a truth which all shall hear, and all shall understand, and all believe, and about which there shall never be another controversy. Can we not afford to wait, dear brethren?

Again, how difficult it is to forgive a palpable injury, and especially when our enemy does not repent, but goes on increasing his malice, and winning, perhaps, to himself, by his cleverness, adherents to his false statements, getting even good people to believe in him—victorious to the last, while we lose to the last! I say, how difficult it is to bear all and forgive all! But it becomes easier when we think of this day, and the tremendous disentanglements that will take place on it. "Vengeance is mine, I will repay," saith the Lord; and in the General Judgment all will be repaid. Then will be seen *the truth as it was*. Then every base subterfuge will be exposed to the core, and all men shall see it. Downwards from the surface, fold after fold of lies will be rolled back, and the depths of deceit will be made apparent to their very



bottom. Then, as I said before, how very little and mean "great" men will appear! Those who, during their lives, were heroes to their followers—who seemed to show such spirit against God and His Church—who said such smart things—who wrote such witty books—will be revealed in the base nakedness of *their secret lives*. The low sin, which they would not have had known for the world, will be told to their former admirers, and the "hero" will become an object of disgust and contempt to those very men upon whose applause they lived while on earth. "Everyone shall be *amazed* at his neighbour; their countenances shall be as *faces burnt*" (Isaias xii. 8). And more, dear brethren, these degradations and shames shall be eternal. Never, never again shall their good name be restored to them; they shall "awake unto reproach, *to see it always*" (Dan. xii. 2).

The Scripture tells us, moreover, that the very sight of the glory of the just will be in itself a torment to those who have deceived themselves and others to the last. "Then shall the just stand with great constancy against those that have afflicted them, and taken away their labours. These seeing it shall be troubled with terrible fear, and shall be amazed at the suddenness of their unexpected salvation, saying within themselves, repenting and groaning with anguish of spirit, These are they whom we had some time in derision, and for a parable of reproach. We fools esteemed their life madness, and their end without honour. Behold, how they are numbered among the children of God, and their lot is among the saints" (Wisdom v. 1—5).

"We fools!" Oh, my brethren, is it come to this? Those whose names were on the lips of all, who were vaunted by the newspapers, who had such inexpressible contempt for the servants of God, and especially for good Catholics, to be obliged to call themselves "fools" at the last! Certainly "God's mills grind slow, but they grind very small." And what shall be said of those who have had such a "horror" of confession? They will confess to God, they say, but never to man. They even go further, and declare it to be a shocking and wicked

thing to confess our sins to man. Do they remember that the Bible tells us that this dreadful day will *be one long confession to man*? Shocking or not shocking, every thought, word and deed, however shameful, with *all* their circumstances, will be clearly confessed to all the men and women who have ever lived! Yes, that secret of theirs will be dragged out at last from their miserable lips, not to one whom God has appointed to heal and absolve, but to the astonished ears of *the very last they would like to know about them*. Their own friends, their own associates—these will be their confessors. What an ennobling thing, then, must be the Sacrament of Penance! It is not only an anticipation of the Judgment, but it is *the* act which will change confusion into joy.

And here a thought, perhaps, may occur to you. If, when the books are opened, and all men are judged—the just as well as the sinners, the saved as well as the lost—everything will be revealed, how is it that it will not be a dreadful ordeal even for the good, who, having sinned deeply in their lives, repented at the last? We can understand, dear brethren, that it will not be so by considering the estimate we take of penitents, even in this present life. Who thinks of the sins of a Magdalen or of an Augustine when they contemplate their heroic penance and fervent charity? We are not surprised to find the one the chosen companion of our Blessed Lady and the holy women at the cross and the sepulchre, nor are we surprised that all Christendom hung upon the lips of the saintly doctor who once had been so far from God. No; they are more ennobled by their penance than they were degraded by their sin.

Besides, the just at the General Judgment appear in all the beauty of their glorified bodies. They bear, even at the tribunal, the marks of the Judge's approval. As each sin is narrated in the ears of all, it is always in connection with the contrition and charity which were the conditions of its pardon. No sin, in fact, is brought up against them but what redounds to their greater glory.

Dear brethren, if these things are so, how careful

should we be to make each confession an anticipation of the Judgment—to form, as it were, a *Judgment conscience*? To be our own accusers now in such a manner that, when the books are opened, there will be no new matter to unfold.

And then again, what a miserable mistake sinners make who take refuge in numbers! Here we shall be in the midst of this vast assemblage, and yet the story of each one will be intensely personal. Our deeds and thoughts and words may be very similar to the deeds, thoughts and words of others, but the *motives* for them, and the *circumstances* attending them, are all our own. And who can answer for another on that dread day? Foolish people have been heard to say, “I will answer for you at the Day of Judgment,” and this, perhaps, with reference to some great crisis in our spiritual lives—becoming a Catholic, for instance. How can any one answer for another when each examination is conducted singly—*one at a time*? Besides, the speaker himself may have changed his mind by the time the Judgment comes, and will appear among the accusers instead of among the defenders.

And now, let us return to the dreadful scene our Lord has Himself described. “The angels shall go out, and shall separate the wicked from among the just” (St. Matt. xiii. 49).

The Judgment is over, the books are closed, the veil of unutterable shame is hanging over the guilty, when the great separation comes.

And what a separation! I have seen, dear brethren, a little boat, in which was an aged couple, who were looking their last on the great ship which was just moving away with their children on board, whom they could never hope to see again in this world. The ship was bound on a voyage of thousands of miles, and the old people had not long to live. When the boat returned to the wharf, how affecting was their distress! They strained their eyes after the great vessel, which was carrying away all they loved, and they looked at each other, and burst out crying again, in an agony of sorrow that



could not be restrained. It was a terrible sight ; but, you know, there was a great deal of comfort that might have been given—many words of hope that might have been whispered to them. *It was not a parting for ever.* And I have seen a young widow, in a country churchyard, bending over the coffin of her husband. She had lost the stay of her life—the breadwinner for her children. What can be said to her ? *It is not a parting for ever.*

But, now, dear brethren, when the angels “go out” to separate, those who part shall never meet again. They have looked on the Occupant of the Throne, and have learnt to desire Him—too late—and they have looked their last—they shall never see Him more. They have seen the King in His beauty—they understand now that nothing can satisfy the human heart but God alone—that the pleasures of sin are only for a season—that the only pleasures that can stand the test of eternity are those to be found at His Right Hand for evermore ; but now it is all too late—those pleasures can never, never be theirs. And the parting from their earthly friends, also, how bitter ! As the Scripture tells us in the passage I have already quoted to you, their whole attitude towards the saved will be changed. They will recognize them as the “children of God,” and understand that their “lot is among the saints.” They will see the loveliness of virtue and the wisdom of their choice, while of themselves they will say, “What hath pride profited us ? or what advantage has the boasting of riches brought us ? All those things have passed away like a shadow, and like a post that runneth on ” (Wisdom v. 8, 9).

And yet they are still human—they can feel and weep. Mark what our Lord tells us : “They shall be cast into the furnace of fire : there shall be *weeping* and gnashing of teeth.” Weeping, for ever and ever, a loss that can never be healed !

Let us conclude the passage in the Gospel : “Have ye understood all these things ? They say to Him, Yes” (St. Matt. xiii. 51). Dear brethren, have ye understood all these things ? Do we thoroughly understand that all this is not a dream, but a dread reality, in which we are



all certainly to take our part ? Either to the right hand, or to the left, of the Judge, we shall be separated.

Once more ; if the Judgment were to-day, should we be among the cockle or the wheat, the sheep or the goats, on the right hand or on the left ?

Have we heard the voice of our Pastor, Christ ? Have we suffered with patience adversities and injuries ? Have we lost this world ? Have we been content to leave the whole of our secret in the Sacred Heart of our Judge ? Oh, dear brethren ! blessed are we if we “have understood” these things.

There remains the consideration of the terms of the *Judge's sentence*. “Come, ye blessed of my Father”—He says to them “Come,” to recall to their memory their first vocation, when He called them to follow Him. “Come to me all you that labour and are burdened, and I will refresh you ;” and again, “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me.” And because they hearkened to this first call, He invites them to His side. “Come out of great tribulation,” in which you have lived, having washed your robes and made them white in my Precious Blood. “Come” out of the midst of the world—come to be crowned, and to receive the reward you have merited for the many victories you have obtained. And again, “Ye blessed of my Father.” Not blessed of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—blessed of Moses and the patriarchs ; but blessed of the Eternal Father ; blessed with all the inheritance of an Eternal Father's love. “Possess the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.” Prepared *for you*. Not prepared principally for the angels, or through want of them, for you—entering in the place of those who lost their seats in this kingdom ; but prepared for you, for your souls, and for your bodies.

Come, then, enter into the joys of my Father, which shall never be taken from you. “Sit down to reign” with me on my throne, as I also am set down to reign with my Eternal Father on His throne.

“Then He shall say to them also that shall be on His

left hand, Depart from me, you cursed, into everlasting fire, which was prepared for the devil and his angels."

Depart from me who am your God, your first beginning and last end. Depart from me who am your Redeemer, from me who made myself man for your sakes, and received these wounds for your remedy; from me who invited you with pardon, and you would not accept it. Depart for ever from my friendship, from my protection, from my kingdom, from my paradise, from my clear sight, and from the copious river of my delights. Depart from the hierarchies and choirs of my angels; depart from my apostles, martyrs, confessors and virgins, and depart from the sweet company of my holy Mother, who would also have been yours, but you would not have her. I did sufficient to draw you to my service, and to my house, but you, through your perverse will, separated yourselves and made yourselves strayers. Therefore, in punishment for this, I, by my just will, do banish and separate you from me and all mine, without hope ever to have any part in me, or aught soever that is mine.

"You cursed, into everlasting fire, which was prepared for the devil and his angels."

Cursed of themselves, as the just were blessed by the Eternal Father. They, also, might have had a blessing, but they preferred the curse. "He loved cursing, and it shall come unto him; and he would not have blessing, and it shall be far from him; and he put on cursing like a garment, and it went in like water into his entrails, and like oil in his bones" (Ps. cviii. 18).

And mark the difference. The "fire" is prepared for the devil and his angels; it was never made for men, if they themselves had not been like the devils, impenitent. The "kingdom" was prepared, from the foundation of the world, for men, if they choose to go there.

And now all is over—nothing remains but the *execution*. The Judge and the blessed withdraw. The signs of the Son of Man are seen no more. The pomp and the majesty of the pageant leave this earth. Time is past. It is all eternity now.

Then shall be fulfilled that malediction written in the Psalm, "Let death come upon them, and let them go down alive into hell" (Ps. liv. 16); and that which St. John speaks of in his Apocalypse, that hell and death, and whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the pool of fire, where they will be tormented for ever and ever. This is the "second death," bitter and eternal, which encompasses the souls and bodies that died the first death of sin, and the corporal death that followed.

Oh! what a furious raving will possess the damned, seeing themselves not able to resist nor to impeach the execution of this sentence! Oh! what a bitter envy will fill them to behold the glory of the just, from whom they are divided! And then, the eternity of it all! When millions and millions of years have elapsed, their punishment will not have been begun!

It is truly an "evil and a bitter thing" to be divided from God, and to have abandoned His holy fear.

Dear brethren, the Judge wishes us to be on His Right Hand more than we wish it ourselves. "Seeking us, He sat down weary" by the well. He prayed, and wept, and died that we, each one of us, might be on His Right Hand. Shall we frustrate His intention? It may be late, very late, with some who read this sermon; they may have given their youth, their middle age, and even old age to the service of the devil, and the world, and the flesh; but it is not *too late*. Choose now to be on God's side, and die with that choice upon you, and you, too, shall be children of the kingdom. And it is not very difficult. Love makes all things easy. Not those who have conquered are counted to have overcome, but *those who die fighting*.

It is a tremendous scene that we have been meditating upon. It is God's own day—God's awful day—God's victorious day; but only die *really trying to obey Him*, and it shall be our day, too!

# Catholic Sermons

BY THE REV. J. B. BAGSHAWE.

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## SERMON L.

### *Grieving for Sin.*

“Who will give water to my head, and a fountain of tears to my eyes?” (Jer. ix. 1).

How, my dear brethren, are we to get that sorrow for sin which is so essential? Without sorrow, nothing that we can do will be of any use whatever. I have dwelt on the importance of self-knowledge; but self-knowledge, without repentance and amendment, is worse than useless. The only object of knowing your sins is to turn away from them for the future. “I have thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies” (Ps. cxviii. 59). If we are to think on our ways to any advantage, it must be with a real desire to turn our feet towards God’s Commandments. Without a desire for improvement, self-examination is generally only a morbid and scrupulous self-tormenting, or else self-complacency. It is unhealthy, as well as useless, to dwell upon past actions and thoughts, unless when there is some distinct object in doing so; hence it is a great folly to make examination of conscience an *end* in your preparation of conscience, whereas it ought only to be the means to an end. People who are preparing themselves for Confession often spend a great part of their time in reading over examinations of conscience, and in thinking over their past actions. This is very often merely a form of idleness and dissipation of mind. Self-examination is good and useful only in so far as it is necessary for an accurate Confession and for obtaining the proper dispositions.

The most important thing you have to do, when you prepare for Confession, is to fill your mind with the dispositions of heart and of will, necessary for obtaining



pardon for past sins; and grace for future improvement. These dispositions are hearty contrition and a firm purpose of amendment. But now comes the difficulty. How are we to be sorry for our sins? You often hear people complain that their hearts are cold—that they have no control over their feelings—that they cannot be sorry, and so forth. Can you be sorry for your sins if you will? Can you obtain their sincere and heartfelt contrition if you like? Yes, my dear brethren, you can. It is your own fault if you do not grieve for your sins as you ought to do. Of course, it is true that you cannot have real contrition except by God's grace; but, then, God will certainly grant you His grace if you do your part. Contrition must come from God. "From above He hath sent fire into my bones, and hath chastised me;" but, then, this is part of that fire which our Lord came to cast on earth. "I am come to cast fire on the earth, and what will I but that it be kindled" (St. Luke xii. 49). You need never fear that God will not kindle this fire by His grace, if only your hearts are prepared for it.

We read how the Prophet Elias offered sacrifice. He built an altar, and laid the wood in order and the sacrifice upon it, and poured water upon the sacrifice; and then, when the time of the holocaust came, he called upon the name of the Lord. "Then the fire of the Lord fell, and consumed the holocaust, and the wood and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench" (3 Kings xviii. 38).

If you, my dear brethren, would always take reasonable pains to prepare your souls, by thought and prayer, you may be sure that Almighty God would send down into your hearts the heavenly fire which is necessary to complete your work.

To obtain sorrow for our sins, we must first have something to be sorry for. Of course, all men, without exception, are guilty of some sin, and have abundant grounds for sorrow. "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (1 St. John i. 8). Yet there are a great many people who find it difficult to see much fault in their own conduct. They

take false views of their obligations and actions, or they have a great power of making excuses for themselves, and their own self-love makes out such a good case for them, that they cannot find much to grieve about. "Who can understand sins? From my secret sins cleanse me, O Lord" (Ps. xviii. 13). If you practically have nothing to confess, it is very difficult to be truly sorry. You must, therefore, make a point of bringing something before your mind, either of recent occurrence, or in your past life, which you can make the subject of sorrowful confession—that is, something which you feel as an important, serious matter. It is not necessary that you should mention any past sin in detail, but you should have something present to your mind, the evil of which really comes home to you, and of which you are heartily ashamed.

A good examination of conscience is, as I have before said, the groundwork of your contrition; but, then, it must be a sorrowful examination. "I will recount to Thee all my years in the bitterness of my soul" (Is. xxxviii. 15). If the examination is made to get up a case for yourself, as a lawyer defending you might do, or out of mere idleness and curiosity, or for the love of thinking of your own doings, it is not much good; but a *sorrowful* examination is the best means for obtaining a true repentance.

We cannot really repent of sin unless we properly understand its nature, and this is a special gift of the Holy Spirit of God. Our Lord says: "When He shall come He will convince the world of sin, and of justice, and of judgment" (St. John xvi. 8). No one can understand the enormity and guilt of sin, or its terrible consequences, without the grace and light of this Holy Spirit. No created being can ever fully and adequately understand the evil of sin, since it is, in a certain sense, an infinite evil; but the higher we go, and the more fully we are enlightened, the greater does the evil appear. We read sometimes of the horror and hatred of sin which the saints displayed, as, for instance, when Queen Blanche said to her young son, St. Louis of France: "I love you, my

dear son, with all the tenderness a mother is capable of; but I would infinitely rather see you fall down dead at my feet than that you should ever commit a mortal sin." Such a feeling as this would almost appear to the eyes of men to be an affectation; but it is simply the natural consequences of the strong light of grace which was within them. If we could ascend into heaven, and see the fear and horror which the very idea of offending God caused in that blessed company, we should have some better notion of what sin was.

Sin is something evil in itself, which is against our nature, and repugnant to right reason, and more or less shameful according to the excellence of the virtue to which it is opposed. Some sins in themselves are very shameful and abominable, whilst, on the other hand, some do not appear so revolting to the imagination and conscience of man. Besides the evil of the sinful act in itself, however, there is what constitutes the essence of every sin, whatever its nature may be, and that is the guilt of a rebellion against God. No matter what the nature of your sin may be—whether it is an action for which all men would cry shame upon you, or one of those things in which fallen man is apt to glory—if it is a sin at all, it is essentially and necessarily disgraceful and abominable, because it is a wilful disobedience and a rebellion against your Creator; it is "worshipping and serving the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed for ever" (Rom. i. 25).

It is on this aspect of sin that we ought most to dwell; by such and such acts, I have rebelled against my Creator; I have turned my back upon Him and taken part with His enemies. I have gone out into the darkness and renounced my place as a child of God! It matters little, in comparison, what the act may be in itself: if it were something for which all men together praised me, what comfort would that be? Every mortal sin—of whatever kind it may be—is essentially an act of rebellion against God, which quenches the spiritual life of the soul and puts out its light: it "fixes a gulf" between you and all good, and makes you, for the time, the object of God's



indignation and contempt. "Thou hast despised all them that fall off from Thy judgments" (Ps. cxviii. 118). Every sin is an act of disloyalty against the Master whom we are bound to serve, and of ingratitude against the Father whom we are all bound to love. "The son knoweth the father, and the servant his master; if, then, I be a father, where is my honour? and if I be a master, where is my fear? saith the Lord of hosts" (Mal. i. 6).

We can, however, best tell the real evil of sin by seeing its effects, and reflecting on its consequences, just as we can best judge of the virulence of a poison by seeing the fearful effects it produces on the human frame: we cannot tell much of the nature of the poison in itself, but there is no mistaking its consequences. "I saw Satan, as lightning, falling from heaven" (St. Luke x. 18). In these words our Lord describes to us the effect of rebelling against God. Satan fell like lightning from heaven the instant his sin was consummated—his beauty and glory were gone—he had divided himself for ever from all good, and no place could be found for him in heaven, even for one moment. Such must ever be the effect of mortal sin upon every creature that it touches.

The soul of a Christian, whilst in a state of grace, is always something exceedingly beautiful. The "Charity of God" has become a garment wherewith it is continually clothed, and all the natural defects and shortcomings are covered over by the beauty of its robe of habitual grace. As a man, he may be feeble in body, and full of faults in mind; as a man, he may be neglected and despised, and even hated by other men; but as a Christian, enjoying the favour of his Creator, he must always have an immense value, and a great and glorious position. "Thou hast made him a little less than the angels, thou hast crowned him with glory and honour" (Ps. viii. 6); and the most glorious of God's angels does not disdain to call him his fellow-servant: every day he goes on heaping up to himself merit, for Jesus Christ's sake. Almost everything that he does is of value, because he is a branch of the vine, and, as such, he cannot but bear



fruit. Then comes mortal sin, and a change takes place, as sudden as Satan's fall. "And I passed by, and lo, he was not; and I sought him, and his place was not found" (Ps. xxxvi. 36). He has fallen from his place, his beauty is gone, all the store of merit which he has gathered together has disappeared, and he is left stained and disgraced by his crime in taking to his heart a creature instead of his God. When the dark shadow of sin comes between man and his God, that "glory and honour" with which he was crowned is taken from him, the light is darkened, the fire extinguished, and the altar is overthrown: "if any one remaineth not in me, he shall be cast forth as a branch, and shall wither, and they shall gather him up, and cast him into the fire, and he burneth" (St. John xv. 6).

It does not matter what a man may have done before; he may, to use St. Paul's words, "have given his goods to feed the poor, and delivered his body to be burned;" the poison of one deliberate act of rebellion, of one mortal sin, is enough to undo all: "it profiteth me nothing" (1 Cor. xiii. 1). If it were conceivable that mortal sin could make its way into heaven, all the beauty and glory and merits of any one of the saints would instantly be destroyed by one mortal sin, and the terrible fall of Lucifer would be repeated.

How, my dear brethren, is it possible to think of any act which has produced such fearful changes in our own souls without being deeply grieved! "There shall be joy in heaven upon one sinner that doth penance:" is there not, also, grief over the miserable fall of the innocent and the holy? The angels grieved over you when you fell away; will you not grieve over yourselves, and over the actions that led you to such a fall?

Mortal sin is a loss, and a disgrace; but, as we well know, it is also a terrible danger. The effect of mortal sin on the soul of man in this life is but a figure of that terrible and eternal evil which will be its consequence, when it becomes the fixed and irrevocable condition of the soul. All that we hear of the terrible justice of God fills us with dismay. The finite mind of man recoils with

dread when it comes in contact with an Infinite God. "The Lord thy God is a consuming fire" (Deut. iv. 24). He is infinite and incomprehensible in all His attributes. "O Lord, Thy mercy is in heaven, and Thy truth reacheth even to the clouds: Thy justice is as the mountains of God: Thy judgments are a great deep" (Ps. xxxv. 6).

If you want to know what God thinks of sin, and what it is in reality, you have only to meditate on the terrible punishment of sin which is revealed to us. "The pool of fire," "which is the second death" (Apoc. xxi. 9); "the worm that shall not die," and "the fire that shall not be quenched" (Is. lxvi. 24): these are the things which best teach us how great is the evil of mortal sin, and how terrible are its consequences. We know that God is infinitely just and infinitely merciful—that is almost the first truth taught us both by faith and by reason; and yet His justice every day casts numbers of His creatures into the fire of hell, because of mortal sin. Sin is so terrible in its own nature, and so grievous an evil, that nothing finite can adequately atone for it; and, when once the soul has cast away the atoning Blood of Jesus Christ by final impenitence, the stain of mortal sin can never be effaced, but holds possession of its victim for ever and for ever.

If ever you have committed a deliberate, grievous sin, by which you cast off the friendship of your Creator, you had eternal damnation staring you in the face. "There is but one step between me and death." Every moment that you remained in mortal sin was a moment of extreme danger.

The danger is past, if it ever existed for you, we will hope and believe, and you have made your peace with God; but, my dear brethren, is not the mere fact of having been exposed to such an awful peril, even for a moment, a thing to be remembered? The man who has narrowly escaped from a shocking death shudders when he comes near the scene of his danger. He goes over, again and again, the hour of peril, and trembles to think what might have been. But what is earthly peril compared to the danger of eternal death?

A Christian, then, ought to have a fear and horror of mortal sin, even if he believes that it has been forgiven—much more if he fears that its terrible consequences are still hanging over him. We should all of us say, with the Psalmist: "Pierce thou my flesh with thy fear, for I am afraid of thy judgments" (Ps. cxviii. 120); for a great fear of sin and its consequences, and a deep sense of the terrors of God's judgments, is almost necessary as the groundwork of a true repentance.

And what have we gained by all the evil we have done in the course of our lives? "What fruit, therefore, have you in those things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of them is death. . . for the wages of sin is death" (Rom. vi. 21). Even the most prosperous of sinners will be compelled to own that the fruit has been small, and the bitterness great. "They have slept their sleep, and all the men of riches have found nothing in their hands" (Ps. lxxv. 6). After the most successful career of vice, men wake up and find nothing in their hands. Look well at what you have gained by sin, and ask: Is it for this that I have offended God, and rebelled against Him?—that I have stained my conscience and run the risk of eternal damnation? "I did but taste a little honey, and behold I die" (1 Kings xiv. 43).

We must now, however, speak more fully of what ought to be the principal motive for contrition, and that is the pure and disinterested love of God. We may be sorry for our sins, for many reasons, and we should make use of all the motives which we can find for sorrow; but the best and most perfect is the love of God. When we grieve for sin, not on account of the evil it has done to ourselves, but simply because it is an offence against One who is infinitely good, our sorrow is more pleasing to God, and more effectual in obtaining pardon, than any selfish regret can be. We must, then, dwell upon God's goodness and God's love, and learn to hate sin for His sake, because it is His enemy.

The way in which we can best bring ourselves to a real and supreme love for Almighty God is by dwelling

on the mercy and kindness which He has shown to us in the mystery of the Incarnation. The very object of this most high mystery was to attract the poor, cold hearts of men to their Creator. In His infinite divinity they cannot understand Him, and it is hard for them to be attracted by attributes which were so far beyond their reach; therefore He came down into the midst of them, to draw their hearts to Him in His human nature. He was born and lived amongst men, that He might give them the opportunity of knowing Him; and He suffered in their sight, that He might touch their hearts and draw them to Himself. "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all things to myself" (St. John xi 32).

If we would learn, then, to hate sin heartily and generously, and to grieve bitterly over the offences we have ourselves committed, we had best go to our Lord in His Passion, and see the work of sin. "Truly, He hath borne our iniquities and carried our sorrows; and we have thought Him, as it were, a leper, and as one struck by God and afflicted. But He was wounded for our iniquities, He was bruised for our sins: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and by His bruises we were healed. All we, like sheep, have gone astray, everyone hath turned aside into his own way: and the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all" (Is. liii. 4). Let us go, then, to our Blessed Lord on the night of His Passion, and try to learn from Him how great is that iniquity which He has borne for us.

Our Lord had determined to redeem us from sin by Himself bearing the pain of it: "forgiving you all offences, blotting out the handwriting of the decree that was against us which was contrary to us. And he hath taken the same out of the way, fastening it to the Cross" (Col. ii. 13). But, first, He would show us how to grieve for sin. He would not wait for the scourge and the nails, but He would begin of Himself to taste the bitterness of the sin which He had taken upon Himself, and it required nothing more to afflict Him with an agony of grief. "And taking with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, He began to grow sorrowful, and to be sad. Then he saith to



them, My soul is sorrowful even unto death : stay you here and watch with me. And going a little farther, He fell upon His face, praying and saying, My Father, if it be possible, let this chalice pass from me. Nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt" (St. Matt. xxvi. 37).

What was in this chalice which was so bitter as to make our Lord "sorrowful even unto death"? He had just come from that last banquet, the Paschal Feast—the Pasch which He had longed for. "With desire I have desired to eat this Pasch with you before I suffer." He had spoken to them nothing but words of consolation and encouragement, but the first taste of that chalice which He was to drink, was so bitter, that "His soul was sorrowful even unto death." What was this bitterness? Nothing else but sin and the consequences of sin. The Most Holy Lord God, in His human nature, had taken upon Himself the sins of His creatures, and Himself deigned to taste the bitterness, the shame, the misery and punishment of sin.

Think what this chalice contained. In it were all the torments and ignominies of the Passion. The bodily pain and mental anguish which Jesus was to suffer—all the reproaches and insults that were to be heaped upon Him that night and on the morrow—were all now before His eyes, and His heart was overflowing with the anguish which such a sight must cause to the human heart. All this He felt because He had man's nature, but, more than all, He felt the sin of which His Passion was the just penalty. Our Blessed Lord felt Himself loaded with the iniquities of men, with all their ingratitude and folly, and all their malice and perversity. With all that infinite hatred of sin which He must necessarily have, our Lord found laid upon Him the guilt of all the shameful sins that men had committed and were to commit till the end of the world. "And with the wicked He was reputed" (St. Mark xv. 28). Can we wonder that the most pure soul of Jesus revolted from all this burden of shame and sin, and that, "being in an agony, He prayed the longer, and His sweat became as drops of blood, trickling down upon the ground" (St.

Luke xxii. 43). He had desired to suffer for men, as He tells us in the words : " I have a baptism wherewith I am to be baptized, and how am I straitened until it be accomplished " (St. Luke xii. 50). But how was He to bear all the load of sin which was laid upon Him? How could He, the Most Holy, endure to be a sinner? " Father, if it be possible, let this chalice pass away."

But let us not think of the sins of other men which do not concern us; let us think of our own sins. We all of us, my brethren, had our share in this bitter chalice which Jesus had to drink; let us think of all the rebellion and ingratitude we have contributed; think how much deliberation and wilfulness, how much sinning against light, and resistance to grace there has been in the sins which we have committed in our time. Surely, as we have had such a share in mixing this most bitter chalice, we ought not to refuse to drink it with Him by some little share of sorrow. He, the innocent Lamb of God, grieves over our sins and their punishment; shall we not, at least, try to join our tears to His Most Precious Blood?

Every detail of our Lord's Passion supplies us with fresh reasons for hating sin, and grieving over it with all our hearts. Stand by whilst Jesus is so cruelly scourged, and ask what it is that gives weight to those ignominious and disgraceful lashes? It is not the cruelty of the executioners, but the malice of our sins, so that we all have our share in them. See Him, again, crowned with thorns and rejected by His own people! " Away with Him, away with Him! crucify Him, crucify Him!" Can we not recognize the voice of our own sins? Is it not precisely what we have said ourselves, again and again, by consenting to mortal sin?

When you prepare to confess your sins, then, and the thought of the number and variety of evil deeds by which you have offended God is once more brought strongly before you, go in spirit to our Lord's feet, and pour out your souls before Him. Do not be contented with mere forms of words, but tell Him, in the language of your own heart, how much you grieve for your

offences—how heartily you wish that you had never sinned, and how strongly determined you are, with the help of His grace, to amend your life for the future.

“Father, I have sinned against heaven and before Thee; I am not now worthy to be called Thy son.” Your first thoughts should be shame for yourself and your past life, and a hatred and detestation of the sins which have brought you down to so wretched a condition, with an earnest desire to be cleansed. “Lord, if Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean.” “Wash me yet more from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin, for I know my iniquity, and my sin is always before me” (Ps. l. 4). But, then, your great desire should be to go, with St. Mary Magdalen, to our Lord’s feet, with a tender personal love to Him, and a great grief for sin, because it has displeased Him. She put aside all human respect, and was indifferent to the company that sat around; she cared nothing for what the world might say or think of her; her only desire was to show her love, and to obtain pardon. So, “with tears she washed His feet.” Let us place ourselves with her at the feet of Jesus, and try with our tears to wash away past stains, or let us take our stand with her at the foot of the cross, and join in her loving, tender contrition, and beg that the Precious Blood of Jesus may intercede for us, that it may cleanse us from sin, and fill us with the strength and grace we need to fight against it for the future. “Many sins are forgiven her because she hath loved much.” Let us try to love much, and we need not fear but that many sins will be forgiven, and much grace will be granted to us.

# Catholic Sermons

BY REV. J. B. BAGSHAWE.

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## SERMON LI.

BY REV. FATHER PHILIP LIMERICK, O.P.

### *Hope.*

“Bonum est sperare in Domino.”

“It is good to hope in the Lord” (Ps. cxvii. 8).

THERE are some virtues that are eternal; they not only raise our souls to a supernatural state, making them godlike in their spiritual beauty, but they cling to them as if they belonged to their very substance, and do not leave them, even in heaven. Such, above all others, is the virtue of charity—the love of God.

But there are other virtues whose nature is different; they belong to our present state only, supplying its imperfections, and consoling its miseries. Like faithful friends, they accompany us through the sorrows and temptations of our mortal life, and leave us at the gate of heaven when their work is done. Though even then we do not altogether lose them; rather they are transformed into something more glorious and better suited to our heavenly life. As the seed bursts forth into a plant, and as the bud develops into a flower, so are these virtues transformed when the soul is glorified.

Such, for example, is the virtue of faith. It is our guide, teacher, monitor, during our mortal life, and leads us to the very throne of God. Then it dies, or rather it becomes vision—the clear vision of the glorious being of God. Such, likewise, is the virtue of which I am now about to speak to you—that of Hope. It is the child and companion of faith, which it resembles in more respects than the one I have mentioned. It remains with us during life, to lift our souls above the vain and frivolous things of earth, to console our sorrows, to strengthen our weakness, to animate us to great deeds. It remains with



us even in our wanderings and sins, and leads us back to our merciful and compassionate God. It does not leave us until it has brought us to our heavenly home, and then it is transformed into joy—the full joy of the happy soul that has obtained possession of all it can desire.

A virtue so beautiful as this is surely deserving of more study than is usually given to it. As we meditate upon it, we shall feel our hearts grow lighter, and we shall become better fitted to encounter difficulties and troubles; indeed, it is the very office of Hope thus to encourage us.

#### I.

Of course, I do not intend to speak of the mere natural quality called hope which all men possess more or less of. Not, indeed, that I undervalue it; on the contrary, it is part of our better nature—one of God's good gifts to us. But it is not a virtue; and, beautiful and useful as it is, it is outmatched by the much greater excellencies of Christian Hope. Nevertheless, to know something of what natural hope is, will help us to understand what is the supernatural virtue which bears the same name.

If, then, we examine what it is we mean when we speak or think of Hope, we shall find that our idea of it is made up of several notions combined in one. Hope is the looking forward to something which we do not yet possess, but which is to be had hereafter. That which Hope looks forward to it always considers to be a good; we do not hope for what is evil, though we often mistake evil for good. The object of our hope must be something within our reach; yet it is something which is rather difficult to obtain, or uncertain; for we do not hope for that which is to be had without an effort, or without chance of disappointment.

This is natural hope. Now let us see in what the supernatural virtue exceeds it.

Well, supernatural Hope also looks forward to the future; but to a future so distant, that human reason by itself cannot penetrate it, for the object of our hope is in eternity.

Hope looks for a good so vast and perfect as to exceed

all natural sense and understanding—one that eye has never seen, nor ear heard, nor loftiest imagination conceived, for it is infinite.

Our Hope looks for that which our own strength can never attain to, so high is it above us ; it seeks for that which it could never contain, even if it reached it.

And yet it is not beyond our reach, nor does it exceed our power to possess, because God has brought it within our grasp, and has given strength to our soul to hold it.

My brethren, Christian Hope is all God's gift. It is He who opens to us those marvellous depths of eternity—it is He who strengthens the eye of the soul, that it may gaze into them, and it is He who gives power to our will to long after the goods which that eternity contains. God reveals to us that infinite good which surpasses our understanding. He makes known to us its excellence, and bids us aspire to obtain it. He, too, brings that good down to the level of man's power ; or, perhaps, it would be better to say that He raises us to the level of what is naturally so much above us. And He speaks to the soul to bid it hope.

Christian Hope, then, is a virtue poured into our souls by God, by which we look, with certain confidence, for our salvation and eternal life.

It is called a *theological* virtue. It is one of those three of which St. Paul says: " Now there remain faith, hope, charity." And by a theological virtue we mean one that looks straight at God and concerns Him immediately. Thus Faith believes in what God makes known to us, taking His word as truth on His own testimony. Charity loves God for His own sake, because He contains everything that is worthy of love. And Hope is a theological virtue for a similar reason.

At first sight, indeed, it might seem that Hope does not look straight to God, as faith and charity do ; for what we hope for is our own good—something for ourselves, the possession of which is to make us happy for ever ; now, this is our own interest. But, if we stop to consider what happiness it is that our Christian Hope makes us desire, we shall see that it does tend straight to

God, not less than faith and charity. Now, this happiness in eternal life which we desire, we look forward to as a reward—it is to be the recompense of a life passed in the service of God ; or, at least, of a sincere repentance for a misspent life, and we call that reward Heaven. But what is it that makes our reward—*what* is Heaven ? My brethren, our reward is God ; Heaven is nothing else but God—God Himself.

Yes ; our reward is nothing less than God. When the Most High called Abraham out of his own country to serve Him in a strange land, He said to Him, “ I myself will be thy exceeding great reward ” (Gen. xv. 1). And God offers the same reward to all those who are willing to sacrifice this world for His sake, by preferring heaven to earth. He Himself will be their reward, and a reward great beyond all greatness. It is God, then, who makes heaven. We think of its various glories and beauties, and we do well, for it is only by thus separating them in our minds, and reflecting on them one by one, that we can form any idea of their excellence. But we must never forget that they are nothing apart from God. It is His presence that lights up heaven with splendour, and that causes all the blessed to thrill with gladness. It is He, too, who gives to heaven its permanence and its undecaying life. The sight of Him is the one essential joy of heaven, that fills the soul and satisfies all its longings. If it were possible to take away God from heaven, and yet leave all its other joys untouched, it would cease to be heaven ; the blessed would pine with sorrow, and would rather think themselves in hell than in the enjoyment of their reward.

You see, then, that in hoping for our own everlasting happiness, we are, in truth, hoping for God Himself, and thus our Hope does tend straight to God, as a theological virtue should do. And this is what gives this virtue its true grandeur. The world extols its heroes for their noble ambition, because they aimed at high things, and undertook great enterprizes—because they risked much, and showed great confidence in their own powers. But what human heroism can be compared, in sublimity

and confidence, to the Hope of the Christian? The Christian sets his foot on all earthly things, even on those that fire the ambition of men the most, as if they were but so much dust; he looks high above where his faith opens to him the dim vistas of eternity; gazing aloft, he faintly discerns the faint outlines of God's throne, and he aspires after that, and will be content with nothing less than a place beside it. The world tells with admiration of the men who have resolved on making a great career for themselves, who determined upon gaining a great future, on becoming lord chancellor or field marshal, or on conquering a kingdom, or who obtained the knowledge of some science under adverse circumstances. I do not say that such men as these are undeserving of our admiration, but I do say that what they have done is as nothing compared to that which the Christian does when he lifts up his soul to heaven, and determines to obtain its glories for his own, when he says to himself: "My God calls me to reign with Him in His kingdom above. By the help of His grace, I will obtain it. Nothing else shall content me, and I will never rest until the crown of everlasting glory is mine."

Now, we may make such a resolution as this: yes, we may do it, even we, miserable as we know ourselves to be. It will not be presumption in us to aspire so high—nay, we must, in some measure, have this lofty aim if we are to be Christians at all. There is no fear of our presuming too much. The fear rather is that we should give way to that weakness and littleness of soul which is the contrary of Hope, and which is one of the greatest obstacles to our salvation.

The object, then, of our Hope is God Himself. If it falls short of Him, it is not true Christian Hope at all. Even when we hope for the means of salvation, for the forgiveness of our sins, for the strength to surmount difficulties, and to vanquish temptations, for the grace to practice the virtues and duties of a holy life, even then it is still in God that we hope. For who is able to help us and succour us in this way? It is God, who is our only helper in time of trouble. Where can we look for



that light and strength which we need ? In God, and in God alone, who is the sole fountain of all good gifts.

Thus it is evermore to God that our hope turns. When we look for everlasting happiness, we hope in Him as our last end. When we look for succour and grace, we hope in Him as our helper and refuge.

## II.

No doubt you will have remarked that in describing Hope to you, I said that it is a virtue which God pours into our souls, and by which we look with *certain confidence* for our eternal salvation. Now, these two words, *certain confidence*, express two excellent qualities which this virtue possesses, and which should greatly recommend it to us. The first of these qualities is CERTAINTY, and a most necessary quality it is. Without it our Hope would be but vain, for it would be nothing more than the visionary dreamings of a madman, doomed to meet with endless disappointment.

Is, then, our Hope certain ? Has it any solid foundation ? If so, what is it built upon ? Yes, our Hope is certain, and its foundation most firm.

The foundation of our Hope is faith—that is, the voice of God bidding us look to Him for an everlasting reward, and promising us the means of gaining it.

This voice of God is heard in the whole of His revelation; it is found throughout the Christian system, and the entire constitution and teaching of the Catholic Church tells us of it. For revelation, Christianity, the Church (which are all different words that mean the same thing under different aspects) proclaim aloud that God has chosen men to reign with Him in glory, and that He wills to give them those helps which will bring them to His kingdom. In truth, our religion, in this life, is nothing but a religion of Hope; even that which it gives us to possess in the present is but the means of obtaining that which is to come. No one has ever doubted that our religion is a religion of Hope.

But, besides this, our faith expressly bids us hope, and gives most consoling promises and assurances to those

who hope. I can put only a few of these before you, because the number of them is simply endless.

In the hundred and forty-fourth Psalm David says: "The eyes of all hope in Thee, O Lord, and Thou givest them food in due season; Thou openest Thy hand, and fillest with blessing every creature." Here the Psalmist encourages us to hope, by alleging the experience of all creatures in general, who look hopefully to God in their needs, and are not disappointed. Hence He wills us all to conclude that, if we hope in the same spirit, we likewise shall receive from God all that we need.

In another psalm (xxi. 5, 6), he appeals to the experience of those who have gone before us, our forefathers in the faith. "Our fathers have hoped in Thee; they have hoped, and Thou hast delivered them . . . they trusted in Thee, and were not confounded."

Elsewhere, he appeals to his own experience in the past: "The Lord is my helper and protector; my heart hath hoped in Him, and I have been helped" (Ps. xxvii. 7).

It is not without reason, therefore, that he exhorts us also to hope with a firm confidence in God. "Trust in Him," he says, "all ye congregation of people; pour out your hearts before Him; God is our helper for ever" (Ps. lxi. 9).

But, do not think that it is the Old Testament alone that encourages us to hope. The same teaching is found in the New Testament as well.

"Hope confoundeth not," says St. Paul (Rom. v. 5). That is, those who hope will never meet with disappointment, their hope will never bring them to shame and confusion by turning out to have been without foundation.

Elsewhere, the apostle draws out the same thought more at length. "I am not brought to shame," he says, "for I know whom I have believed, and I am certain that He is able to keep that which I have committed to Him against that day" (2 Tim. i.). No suffering in this world discourages St. Paul, because He is so certain of Him in whom he has put his trust, knowing that God can never

fail to care for his soul, and preserve it unhurt to the last day.

And St. Paul also says: "We have fled for refuge to hold fast the hope set before us, which we have as an anchor of the soul, sure and firm" (Heb. vi. 18). You see he compares the Christian's Hope to the anchor which holds a ship, and keeps it safe in its place amidst the dangers of the storm. Just so does our Hope keep us firmly united to God, notwithstanding the temptations which would separate us from Him.

Now, the kind of certainty which our Hope possesses is that which is called *conditional*, because it depends upon a condition being fulfilled. Thus, we might say, If the Prince of Wales survives the Queen, he will be King in her place. A better example still, because less subject to the mutations which are inseparable from human things, is to say, If the sun rises to-morrow it will be day. No one doubts that the sun will rise, and, therefore, no one doubts it will be day to-morrow.

Now, just in the same way, if a certain condition be fulfilled, then we shall see God and possess everlasting glory. Our Hope is certain, you see, if the condition be fulfilled.

And what is the condition? It is this: that we should persevere to the end in the service of God. If we do this our salvation is certain. All those, therefore, who, relying on God's grace, intend by His help to persevere to the end, have a *certain Hope of everlasting life*.

Listen to the promises God has made in the very words of our Lord Jesus Christ:

"If thou wilt enter into life, keep the Commandments" (Matt. xix. 17).

Those, then, who keep the Commandments, will obtain eternal life.

Again: "He that shall persevere to the end shall be saved" (Matt. xxiv. 13).

Those, then, who persevere, may be certain of their salvation. Their perseverance is the condition.

And now listen to the same promise, in the words of St. Paul: "God will render to every man according to

his works: to them, indeed, who, according to patience in good work, seek glory and honour and incorruption, life everlasting" (Rom. ii. 6, 7). This is the same truth expressed in somewhat different words. God will render eternal life to those who are patient—that is, who *persevere* in good works. Persevere, then, and you have a sure Hope of life everlasting.

Now, as God has made these promises, our Hope is absolutely certain, provided only the condition be fulfilled.

It is certain, because God cannot deceive. "It is impossible for God to lie" (Heb. vi. 18). He is Truth itself, and all that He says and does is truth. "The works of His hands are truth" (Ps. cx. 7).

It is certain, because of God's infinite power. "Whatsoever God has promised, He is able to perform" (Rom. iv. 21).

It is certain, because of God's boundless love. Since He has been pleased to pour forth all the riches of His love upon us, even in this life, it is not possible that He will allow the confidence we place in Him to be disappointed. And, therefore, the apostle says, "Hope confoundeth not, because the charity of God is poured forth in our hearts" (Rom. v. 5).

But who ever really doubted that on God's side our hope is sure? Our confidence is apt to be overclouded, we need to be reminded sometimes of the grounds of it. But it is not God that we really doubt, for we know that His truth, His power, and His love are unchangeable. Rather will the earth fail from beneath our feet, and the heavens from above our heads, than that the least of God's promises should fail those to whom they are made.

### III.

I mentioned a second excellence that our hope possesses, besides its certainty, and that is its CONFIDENCE. And as the certainty of our hope makes it precious to us, so its confidence makes it pleasing to God, and draws down His blessing upon us.

When we hope we trust God; we take Him at His word, and shape our conduct accordingly. In this way



Hope goes further than faith. It is comparatively little that we should believe in Him—it would be unreasonable to do otherwise; when we hope in Him we do much more. To hope is to act on our faith, and to make a practical beginning of carrying it out in our lives. God says: “I am your reward; serve me, that you may obtain possession of me.” Faith answers, “I believe, Lord, that thou art my reward,” but goes no further. Hope says, “I desire, O Lord, to obtain Thee, and I will so live as to make myself worthy to possess Thee.”

That which makes the peculiar merit of this confidence is that what God promises is *invisible* and *in the future*. The reward He offers us is not a thing we can see, or touch, or possess now. All is out of sight, and is yet to come; and it is not merely to be had at some future time, but in another life beyond that death which seems to close our very existence. Surely it is no small thing to hope for a life after death, when all seems ended; to hope for joys that no eye has ever beheld. And this is what Hope does.

But the hopeful man does more than this; he not only looks forward to possessing happiness in the future, but for the sake of this hope he sacrifices the present. Many a joy offers itself to him, but he must refuse it because it is incompatible with his hope of possessing God in heaven. Many a chance of gain comes within his reach, but he must decline it because it is inconsistent with his hope of heavenly glory. Many a hard and painful duty he has to undertake, in order to earn this yet unseen reward. Meanwhile, unbelievers and worldly men scoff at him as a fool, because he loses what is certain in the present for the sake of what seems so remote, even if it be certain. But the hopeful man holds steadfastly on his way: that which he looks for is out of sight, indeed, but not remote to him; and it is not uncertain, nay, it is more certain than what he sees with his bodily eyes. If his heavenly reward should *seem* remote or doubtful, so much the better. He will have the opportunity of showing how completely he trusts God, and the promises which He has made.

It is on account of this confidence in Him which it displays that God prizes our hope, and values it beyond almost any homage we can render Him. No act of worship is more acceptable to Him, or glorifies Him so much. Hence God can refuse nothing to the man who hopes, but pours out upon him all the riches of His love. Listen to the promises which He makes to those who hope in Him, as holy David relates them in His name: "Because he hath hoped in me, I will deliver him; I will protect him because he hath known my name. He shall cry to me, and I will hear him; I am with Him in trouble, I will deliver him, and will glorify him; I will fill him with length of days, and I will show him my salvation" (Ps. xc.).

The saints of the Old Law knew how God valued their hope, and they were not slow to allege this claim to His help on account of their hope. Holy Scripture is full of such prayers as these. "In Thee, O Lord, have I hoped, let me not be confounded for ever" (Ps. xxx. 1). "Preserve me, O Lord, because I have hoped in Thee" (Ps. xv. 1). "O Lord, my God, in Thee have I hoped, save me" (Ps. vii. 1). "Do not Thou disappoint me of my hope" (Ps. cxviii. 130). The nature of Hope has not changed; it is still as pleasing to God now as it was in the days of old, and it will have the same power to win His favour for us as it had in drawing down His blessing on them.

I will not dwell longer on this subject. I have said enough to show you how beautiful and excellent a virtue Hope is. In truth it is a universal virtue, one that is useful for all, and that none can dispense with.

Hope is a virtue for the just, they need it to encourage them in the difficulties that they are sure to meet in their way towards heaven; it will console them in their disappointments, and will give them courage to persevere.

It is a virtue for sinners also. There are none who need it so much; how shall they attempt to rise from their miserable state, and go through all the labour of self-examination and repentance, unless they can hope

for mercy and pardon? Hope is the basis of all repentance, and leads the sinner straight to God.

Hope is a virtue for the young; they are naturally hopeful, make light of difficulties, and throw themselves eagerly into anything that promises a speedy reward. But they are too apt to waste their ardour upon aims that are unworthy of them. Let them raise their eyes above the poor mean objects for which alone they can hope in this life; let them seek after the true, great, imperishable joys that are to be found in God alone.

It is a virtue for those who are in middle age. They feel the burden of life, and have experienced some of its disappointments; they are apt to content themselves with the present only, and to value only the gains and the pleasures that can be had now. Oh, let them not narrow their hearts to the interests of this fleeting present. Let them remember that to possess God is a real good, a true and unending pleasure, and that to hope for God is more than worthy of all the energies of a life.

It is a virtue for the old. From them the poor satisfactions of this present life have already passed away. They have experienced the emptiness of all human hope, and have now nothing further to look forward to in this life. Their lives will be desolate indeed if they are not cheered by the beautiful Hope of heaven and God, which can never disappoint.

But, especially, Hope is a virtue for the hour of death. Who would dare to face death—dark, mysterious death—leading to an immense unknown eternity, unless he were strengthened and cheered by Hope? Blessed are they who live in Hope, for to them death is not a gloomy horror, to be dreaded and kept out of sight, but

Bright death, that is the welcome dawn  
Of our eternal day.

And blessed are they who die in Hope. “Their hope is full of immortality” (Wis. iii. 4), for it will lead to a never-ending life, and be transformed into an unfading Joy.

# Catholic Sermons

BY REV. J. B. BAGSHAWE.

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## SERMON LII.

### *The Holy Eucharist.*

"Neither is there any other nation so great that hath gods so nigh them, as our God is present to all our petitions" (Deut. iv. 7).

I NOW come to speak of the greatest of all sacraments—the Holy Eucharist. This is, pre-eminently, the Blessed Sacrament—high in dignity above even the other sacred rites by which Jesus has communicated to us the saving merits of His Precious Blood. They are, indeed, blessed as the fountains of grace; but this is the very source of grace. They are, as it were, the rays of the sun; but this is the very sun itself, since it is not only a sacrament, but the Author of the Sacraments—our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Holy Sacrament of the Altar is the great treasure of the Christian Church. Our Lord sent His apostles out to preach the Gospel without any worldly goods. They were to take nothing for their journey, "neither staff, nor scrip, nor bread, nor money" (St. Luke ix. 3); but they were to carry with them one great treasure, and that was His own Real Presence in the Holy Eucharist. One of the fathers tells us that, "after our Saviour was taken up into heaven, the apostles, before being scattered over the whole world, being together in oneness of mind, passed whole days in prayer; and, having found the Mystic Sacrifice of the Lord's Body a great consolation, they sang it at very great length: for this and teaching they considered preferable to anything else. With very great gladness and much joy, they were instant in this Divine Sacrifice, ever bearing in mind the Lord's Word, which says, 'This is my Body,' and 'Do this in memory of me;' and 'He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood abideth in me, and I in him'" (St. Proclus). Their converts were to be found ever "persevering in the doc-



trine of the apostles, and in the communication of the breaking of bread, and in prayers" (Acts ii. 42).

From that time forward to the present, the Holy Sacrament has been the one great treasure and consolation of the Christian Church.

In the days of persecution, when the faithful had to hide for their lives under ground, they carried with them their treasure into the catacombs, and celebrated Mass upon the tombs of the martyrs; and, when peace came, their first care was to erect grand churches in which to deposit the Sacred Body of the Lord. When missionaries, the successors of the apostles in after ages, went out to convert the heathen, they cared not for gold and silver, but relied only on that great Presence which they took with them, "breaking bread from house to house" (Acts ii. 46), as the apostles had done.

At all times, whether in peace or in strife—whether under the dome of St. Peter's, or in the poorest shed used for a church—the Holy Sacrifice, the Blessed Sacrament, has been the treasure of the Church—the treasure which the world did not give, and cannot take away. Around the Blessed Sacrament, moreover, has grown up the whole worship of the Christian Church; her liturgy is to do honour to it, her ceremonial is grouped around it. Why are her churches so gorgeous and her ceremonial so elaborate? Simply to do honour to the Presence of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Church is but His house—the altar His mercy-seat; the vestments of the clergy are the externals of His court, and the lights which burn before the altar are the signs of His Presence.

Whatever the Church has to do, the Blessed Sacrament is her great resource. Is the Church rejoicing? Is she mourning? Is she in danger? On all occasions her people crowd around our Lord's throne—the Holy Mass is celebrated, the Blessed Sacrament is exposed, the candles are lighted, the incense ascends to heaven, carrying with it the praises, or the wailing and supplication, of all her children.

Of all Catholic devotions, the first is that to the Blessed Sacrament. Into whatever church you go, at whatever

hour you may present yourself, the first thing that catches your eye is the reverence paid to the Presence of our Lord. It may be at a High Mass, when the altar is adorned with candles and flowers, and surrounded by the clergy; it is, perhaps, the time of the Consecration, and every head is bowed down in reverence as the Blessed Host is elevated; or it may be a Solemn Benediction, when our Lord, in the Blessed Sacrament, is placed on His throne over the altar, and the faithful bow their heads for His blessing; or the church may be silent and obscure, with none present but a few poor worshippers on their knees; still it is the lamp that hangs before the tabernacle that first attracts your attention, and you will observe the solemn genuflection made by everyone who passes before the altar. Always, under every phase—whether costly or poor, full of people or deserted—a Catholic church is the house of God; and there is a solemnity about it which speaks to the heart of every one who enters. Even strangers can hardly fail to be struck by it, and to ask, Whence come this special solemnity and reverence? It is, indeed, full of a great Presence, of which all the external symbols are but the shadows. “Indeed, the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not. And trembling, he said, How terrible is this place! This is no other but the house of God and the gate of heaven” (Gen. xxviii. 16).

Well may the church be filled with the reverence befitting the Divine Presence, since we have here the true mercy-seat of God upon earth. In the Old Law, Almighty God placed His mercy-seat in the Holy of Holies, in His Temple. “Thou shalt make a propitiatory of the purest gold. Thou shalt make also two cherubims of beaten gold: spreading their wings and covering the oracle, and let them look one towards the other, their faces being turned to the propitiatory wherewith the ark is to be covered. Thence will I give orders, and will speak to thee over the propitiatory, and from the midst of the two cherubims” (Exod. xxv. 17).

Nothing on earth could be grander or more venerable than this spot which God chose for His mercy-seat—in which He was pleased to hear and answer the petitions

of His people, and great was the reverence which surrounded it.

It *represented* the Presence of the Almighty; but in reality He was there only as He ever must be throughout the universe. In the Christian mercy-seat, on our altars, we have the Real Presence of God Incarnate. St. John saw Him in his vision: "In the midst of the seven candlesticks, One like to the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the feet, and girt about the breast with a golden girdle. And His head and His hair were white, like white wool and as snow, and His eyes were as a flame of fire, and His feet like unto fine brass, as in a burning furnace, and His voice as the sound of many waters. And He had in His right hand seven stars, and from His mouth came out a two-edged sword, and His face was as the sun shineth in his power. And when I had seen Him I fell at His feet as dead. And He laid His right hand upon me, saying: Fear not, I am the First and the Last, and alive, and was dead: and, behold, I am living for ever and ever, and have the keys of death and of hell" (Apoc. i. 12). Such is the Presence which our Lord grants to us in the Sacrament of the altar. He conceals Himself from our sight because we are frail, mortal men, and, like St. John, we should fall at His feet as dead men, could we see Him in His glory; but He is present wholly and entirely, in His Divine and human nature—God and Man—with all the rights to glory and reverence which belong to Him.

On every altar, in the Blessed Sacrament, our Lord resides, and keeps His Court as He does in heaven. "And I saw: and behold in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the ancients, a Lamb standing, as it were, slain, having seven horns and seven eyes: which are the seven spirits of God, sent forth into all the earth . . . and when He had opened the book, the four living creatures, and the four-and-twenty ancients, fell down before the Lamb, having, every one of them, harps and golden vials, full of odours, which are the prayers of the saints: and they sung a new canticle, saying: 'Thou art worthy, O Lord, to take the book

and open the seals thereof : because Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God in Thy Blood, out of every tribe and tongue, and people and nation ” (Apoc. v. 6).

“ The merciful and gracious Lord hath made a memorial of His wonderful works, He hath given food to them that fear Him ” (Ps. cx. 4). In the Holy Sacrament—the sacred food that He gives to men—our Lord renews the wonderful things that He did on earth : He is still the Hidden Deity as He was in the stable of Bethlehem, hiding Himself in humility from the sight of men : He is still the same Jesus of Nazareth that He was when He walked through the streets of Jerusalem, or the corn-fields of Galilee : as He was when the people came out in throngs to hear His word, and receive food at His hands. He is the Lamb “ standing, as it were, slain,” and He continually puts before us, and mystically renews, His most Blessed Passion and death, and His glorious resurrection. The Blessed Sacrament is the continuation of His Incarnation, and every one of the wonderful works of the Incarnate God has its counterpart and completion in the hidden life of Jesus on the altar.

“ My Father worketh until now, and I work ” (St. John v. 17). In the Holy Eucharist our Lord is in His Church, as He was in the midst of His apostles, guiding and ruling His Church, calling sinners to Himself, healing the sick, cleansing the lepers, and working out the sanctification of the elect. He is before us as the perpetual example of all virtues : the example of a hidden life, with its virtues of humility and retirement. “ Standing, as it were, slain,” He sets us the perpetual example of sacrifice, and constantly calls upon us to “ deny ourselves, and take up our cross and follow Him.” He sets the example of patience and unworldliness, ready at all times to help the weakness, and supply the wants of the poorest and lowliest of His children.

Truly, this Sacrament is the memorial of His wonderful works, and wonderful it is in itself, and in everything that surrounds it. Who can tell how many miracles of power and love are contained in its institution ? In the Incarnation He “ debased Himself, taking the form of a



servant," and "humbled Himself, becoming obedient unto death, even to the death of the cross" (Phil. ii. 7). In the Holy Eucharist our Lord has made Himself obedient to His own creatures, through all time. "The Lord obeying the voice of man." He has humbled Himself to be their servant, ready at all times to do their will, and to minister to their wants. He has put His honour into the hands of men, not of good men only, but of the wicked, so that they may honour Him and show Him reverence if they will; whilst, on the other hand, they have it in their power to profane and outrage Him. How often, in the course of ages, has our Lord allowed His Holy Sacrament to be profaned? How often have gross external sacrileges been perpetrated! How often has He been insulted by hypocritical homage, and especially by unworthy Communion! How often has our Lord suffered men to come to Him with Judas's "Hail, Rabbi," with his hypocritical kiss on their lips, and his treason in their hearts! And yet, through it all, He has been faithful to the promise He once made: "I am with you all days, to the consummation of the world."

The Blessed Sacrament is called the "Mystery of Faith," because it is a combination and memorial of all God's wonders—the wonders of "His goodness, and patience, and long-suffering," and also of the wonders of His power. Once during His life on earth, our Lord changed water into wine; but this wonder of "Transubstantiation" He repeats daily in the Holy Mass, when the bread and wine on the altar are changed into His own Body and Blood. Once or twice He fed thousands by the multiplication of the bread, but in the Blessed Sacrament, He every day feeds thousands and hundreds of thousands. In every Church He is present, and yet He is not divided; He gives Himself in Communion to all that approach, and yet gives Himself entirely to each one—*sumit unus, sumunt mille, quantum isti, tantum ille, nec sumptus consumitur*. The external, visible miracles which He worked on earth were great and magnificent proofs of Divine power, but they were only the symbols and indications of the miracles of a higher order which

He was to continue to the end of time. He worked these lesser miracles in the sight of men, that we might be encouraged to believe the miracles which we cannot see.

God is wonderful in all His works, and most wonderful in that Sacrament which is a memorial of them. He has exerted His power over nature, in order to hide Himself under the lowly forms of bread and wine; He has veiled His glory, and has become a hidden God in His own creation, to be in the midst of men, and to become their servant. Why has He done so? Who can find reasons for the wonderful works of God? "Who hath known the mind of the Lord?—or who hath been His counsellor?—or who hath first given to Him, and recompense shall be made Him" (Rom. xi. 34). We cannot fathom the plans and designs of the Almighty. We see "in a glass in a dark manner," and we sometimes fancy that we understand; but even in those things which we seem to understand, how incomplete is our comprehension! We know very little even of those things which appear to us the plainest. "Man cannot be justified compared with God. If he will contend with Him, he cannot answer Him one for a thousand" (Job ix. 3).

Yet, with all this, we *may* ask, we may reverently search into the secrets of God's designs, and, with the Blessed Mother of God, we may say to our Lord: "Why hast Thou done so to us?" Why should our Lord have instituted such a Sacrament, by which He makes Himself, in some sort, dependent on His creatures, and in which He becomes their servant?

The Blessed Sacrament is a continuation of the Incarnation. What God began amongst men, by becoming man and living with them, He continues in His Eucharistic Presence. The difficulties to be overcome in the one mystery are much like those of the other; the objections to one are the objections to the other; and, at the same time, the reason of one is the reason for the other. If we want to understand anything about the Holy Eucharist, we must first learn to meditate on the Incarnation.

That God should have become incarnate, and come

down to this earth, is the greatest of all conceivable mysteries. He, who was from all eternity, and self-existing, condescended to be born in time, and to appear on this earth as a new-born babe; He, whom the whole universe cannot contain, "did not abhor the Virgin's womb," and chose to be laid in the narrow manger; He, from whom all have received, and "in whom all creatures live and move, and have their being," chose to be dependent on men for the necessities of life. The All-wise and All-perfect appeared to "grow daily in wisdom and age and grace before God and man;" and He who, of His own nature, could know no sorrow, condescends to suffer all the woes of body and mind which men have to bear.

Nothing but boundless love could have thought of this condescension, and yet, in a sense, it was a necessity. In His Divine nature, God is infinitely removed from His creatures. His creation, with its immeasurable vastness, and the riches and beauty which meet us at every step, is as nothing in His sight; if it were magnified a thousand and a thousand fold, it could never approach to the immensity of its Creator. "Behold, the Gentiles are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the smallest grain of a balance; behold, the islands are as a little dust, and Libanus shall not be enough to burn, nor the beasts thereof sufficient for a burnt-offering. All nations are before Him, as if they had no being at all, and are counted to Him as nothing and vanity" (Isaias xl. 15).

So in the moral world, if we could unite the intellects and mental excellences of men and angels, not only could they not reach, but they could not approach to the Almighty Mind that created them. You may go up into the highest mountain, and see peak after peak rising above you, till you reach the highest; but even the highest appears just as far off from the sun as the lowliest valley; so you may go on, rising in the scale of creation, and through all the choirs of angels in heaven, giving to each rank the brightest endowments that your fancy can paint, and then the highest is—not in appearance merely, but literally and truly—as far off from the infinite Creator as the meanest of created things,

since all the united efforts and aspirations of creatures cannot bring them one step nearer to the level of their Creator.

Between God and creatures, then, there is an infinite gulf, which no finite being can possibly pass over. If, therefore, God is to come near to His creatures, it is He, not they, who must pass the immeasurable distance which separates them. They cannot possibly share His nature, and, if they are to be united to Him, it is He who must condescend to come down to them, and share their finite nature. "I have loved Thee with an everlasting love" (Jer. xxxi. 3). The infinite and everlasting love of the great God made Him pass the gulf which divided Him from His creatures. He took upon Himself their nature, and became one of them. He assumed a body and soul, with all the natural powers and feelings of men, that men might learn to sympathize with Him, and that so He might raise them to Himself. In the human nature, which He had assumed, the great God learned to practice the lowly virtues and human affections which belong to the condition of men, that He might set before them the most perfect pattern of humility, patience, and obedience, and teach them, through many tribulations, to enter into His glory. "And, whereas indeed He was the Son of God, He learned obedience by the things which He suffered, and, being consummated, He became to all that obey Him the cause of eternal salvation" (Heb. v. 8).

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts; nor your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are exalted above the earth, so are my ways exalted above your ways, and my thoughts above your thoughts" (Isaias lv. 8). In His Divine nature, God was above the understanding and sympathy of His creatures; He was too vast, and too mighty, and too far off from them, so that it was hard for them even to love Him. For this reason He became man, that men might sympathize with Him, and take Him for their model, and give Him their hearts.

What God did for the whole human race in His Incarnation, He repeats and continues, for every individual, in



the Blessed Sacrament. He condescended to become one of us, and to walk on earth. He let men hear His voice and learn His lesson ; but how shall we bridge over the ages which separate us from Him ? How is He to complete His work, and come near to the heart of each one of us ? In His mortal life, He could be present with but few of His people. One age and one country only could possess Him during His sojourn upon earth ; and men cannot possibly pass over the gulf of time which separates distant ages.

The same love which bridged over the vast gulf which divides His Divinity from creatures, can alone complete its work by passing over the intervals of time and space. He is the "Lamb slain from the beginning of the world," and every age must, in some sense, possess Him. His coming was anticipated by the sacrifices which brought His Passion near to individual men, and made them look forward to His actual coming ; and, after that coming, He has continued His Presence to them for ever in the Sacrament of the Altar.

In this sacrament, He continues the Incarnation, and takes a permanent place in His creation ; and, to do so, deigns to expose Himself to all the accidents which befall men. He is with His people for ever ; He went down with them into the catacombs, and was persecuted with them. "He went down with them into the pit, and in bands did not forsake them" (Wisd. x. 14). When the faithful had to flee from place to place, and were like sheep in the midst of wolves, He loyally bore His part, and did not disdain to expose Himself to insult and sacrilege with them. He might, if He would, have preserved His Sacramental Presence from the smallest indignity ; but no ! "The Lord is the portion of my inheritance and of my chalice" (Ps. xv. 5), and the Lord also chose for Himself the lot and the chalice of His people.

"Lo, I am with you all days, till the consummation of the world !" Neither the ingratitude of man, nor the power of the enemy—neither blasphemy nor sacrilege can ever make Him withdraw that Presence which He has promised.

Our own country was once covered with shrines erected to do honour to Him in the Holy Sacrament; but the storm came, and His sanctuaries were dishonoured, and His Sacred Presence violated, and He fled with His people, and was content to share their lot of persecution, whilst His Sacramental Presence was blasphemed and ridiculed in those very churches which were raised to Him. But now He has come back to us, and His Sacramental Presence is once more to be found, stealing over the land; and, in a thousand churches, the sanctuary lamp tells us where Jesus is to be found in the Sacrament of His love.

All the things which strike us as marvellous in the Blessed Sacrament have their counterpart in the Incarnation. It is wonderful that Jesus should descend upon the altar, and that no man should see Him. "You know not whence I come, or whither I go" (St. John viii. 14); but so it was at Bethlehem. "For while all things were in quiet silence, and the night was in the midst of her course, the Almighty Word leaped down from heaven from Thy royal throne" (Wisd. xviii. 14). It is a marvel that He should be amongst us, and that men should go on, in their ordinary ways, without thinking of Him; but so it was whilst He was visibly amongst them. "There hath stood One in the midst of you, whom you know not" (St. John i. 26). We wonder to think that He can allow His Body and Blood to be violated by sacrilegious hands, and profaned by unworthy lips; but was it not so in the garden of Gethsemane? The reproaches cast upon Him in the Holy Sacrament—the blasphemous words we sometimes hear—are but the echo of the insults and mockeries heaped upon Him in His Passion; and now, as then, His only answer is, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

In the Blessed Sacrament, then, our Lord does for all ages and for all countries what in His mortal life He did for one. He does it, not as then, in a manner to be apprehended by the natural senses, but just as really and truly, although His way of acting is concealed under the Sacramental veils, and His Presence can be discovered only by the light of faith.

He came to be always with His Church, as a body—to be its treasure and its life, and, at the same time, to be the strength, rest, and refreshment of every Christian soul. He came to be the friend and companion of all classes of people—to be the help and reward of the penitent just turning away from sin, and to be the perfection of the saints. He was to be the ready help of men battling with the world, and hard pressed by temptation, and to be the solace and paraclete of a hidden, spiritual life. He was to give Himself as nourishment to the child just entering the world, and to be the viaticum of the sick and weary who are just going forth into it; He was to be to each one “the Bread of Heaven, containing in itself every delight.”

Our Lord knew how much we all needed Him, and that, without His own personal presence, all the ministrations of men would be insufficient. “I am the vine, you the branches; he that abideth in me and I in him, the same beareth much fruit; for, without me, you can do nothing” (St. John xv. 4). How were we to abide in the vine? Our Lord Himself tells: “He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood abideth in me, and I in him” (St. John vi. 57). On this St. Cyril of Alexandria says: “If a man take two pieces of wax and melt them, and pour the one into the other, they necessarily mingle; so, also, he that receiveth the Body and Blood of the Lord doth become so joined with the Lord, that he is to be found in Christ, and Christ in him.” Thus, then, our Lord has provided the most perfect way in which we can abide in Him, and be most completely united with Him in body and in spirit.

*O sacrum Convivium, in quo Christus sumitur, recolitur memoria passionis ejus, mens inpletur gratia: et futuræ gloriæ nobis pignus datur.*

“O sacred banquet in which Christ is received, the memory of His Passion renewed, the mind replenished with grace, and a pledge of eternal glory is given to us.” Amen.

# Catholic Sermons

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## SERMON LIII.

### *Holy Communion.*

“My flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed” (St. John vi. 56).

OUR Lord has left us the Sacrament of His Body and Blood under the form of food, in order to impress upon us, in the most striking manner, the vital importance of receiving it. For the preservation of natural life nourishment is necessary, and, to maintain healthy and vigorous life, the food must be regular and sufficient; and it is necessary that we should have the power of drawing nourishment from the food supplied to us by taking its strength into ourselves, so as to live by it. If we were to neglect this first function of natural life, we should fall into disease, and surely die. The Psalmist says: “I am smitten as grass, and my heart is withered, because I forgot to eat my bread” (Ps. ci. 5).

What is true of our natural life holds good, in a wonderful way, of the life of the soul; we need a constant supply of the grace of God to feed our souls, and to afford this food, Jesus instituted the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist. Our Lord has made the Holy Communion, under ordinary circumstances, an essential condition of spiritual life. “Except you eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink His blood, you shall not have life in you” (St. John vi. 54); and, moreover, to carry out the parallel, you must receive the Blessed Sacrament regularly and frequently if you would keep your souls in spiritual health and vigour.

One of the most important duties of a Christian, then, is to know how properly to avail himself of the Holy Eucharist, as a means of spiritual nourishment, by receiving Holy Communion devoutly and profitably. The grace which we receive depends largely on the way in



which we approach the holy table, and we need all the knowledge and all the piety we can bring with us, by way of preparation. Our Lord accommodates Himself to the capacities and wants of His people; He is the nourishment of children, and is contented with the little knowledge and preparation they can afford; but, at the same time, He is the bread of the strong, and taxes to the uttermost all the intellect and devotion of the greatest saints. He wants from each of us *all* that we can do, and He is satisfied with that.

If we would learn how to prepare ourselves for receiving the Holy Communion, we cannot do better than turn to the earliest and most authoritative instruction ever given to Christians—I mean that left to us by St. Paul. He says: “For I have received of the Lord that which, also, I delivered unto you, that the Lord Jesus, in the same night in which He was betrayed, took bread, and, giving thanks, broke and said, Take ye and eat: this is my Body, which shall be delivered for you; this do for the commemoration of me. In like manner the chalice also, after He had supped, saying, This chalice is the New Testament in my Blood; this do ye, as often as you shall drink, for the commemoration of me. For, as often as you shall eat this bread, and drink the chalice, you shall show the death of the Lord, until He come. Therefore, whosoever shall eat this bread, or drink the chalice of the Lord unworthily, shall be guilty of the Body and Blood of the Lord. But let a man prove himself, and so eat of that bread and drink of the chalice. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh judgment to himself, not discerning the body of the Lord. Therefore are there many infirm and weak among you, and many sleep. But if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged” (1 Cor. xi. 23).

In this most impressive passage, my dear brethren, there are many things to observe. The apostle begins by the emphatic assertion of the Real Presence. “I received of the Lord that which I delivered unto you.” Words could not be found to express the Catholic faith more plainly; if we wish to find emphatic language in

which to declare the faith of the Church about Transubstantiation, what could we say stronger or clearer than the words of the apostle? St. Paul repeats the most distinct and precise words of our Lord Himself at His Last Supper, and draws from them the exact and obvious conclusion which follows from the doctrine of the Real Presence: "He that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh judgment to himself, not discerning the body of the Lord."

He then goes on to tell us what follows from this great mystery—that we are bound to look carefully into ourselves before we presume to receive: "Let a man prove himself, and so eat of that bread," and warns us of the consequences of neglect in the words: "Therefore are there many infirm and weak among you, and many sleep."

All these points require careful consideration, and in them are included all that is necessary in preparing for Communion. St. Paul says that men eat and drink judgment to themselves by "not discerning the body of the Lord." It is evident that the groundwork of all preparation is well to "discern" the true nature and excellence of the Divine food which God gives to us in His Holy Sacrament. If a man were to receive Holy Communion, not knowing what it was, it is plain that he would receive unworthily. He could not possibly have the dispositions of mind, the devotion and reverence which are due to the Holy Sacrament, if he did not understand its greatness. In it our Lord is the hidden Deity—*Adoro te devote latens Deitas*, "I adore Thee devoutly, O hidden Deity, which liest concealed under these forms." And it is plain that we must know how to discern this hidden Deity if we would worthily approach to Him. The more clearly and deeply we discern His presence, the more we are filled with the thought of it, the more devoutly we shall receive. The angels and saints in heaven, "the ancients and living creatures," having their harps and golden vials, "fall down before the Lamb, and sing to Him a new canticle," because they see Him face to face; and we, too, must try by faith to

pierce through the sacramental veil that hides Him from us, and we shall share in their joy and adoration.

By "discerning the body of the Lord," we mean many things. We have first to understand, as far as our capacity extends, what God has revealed to us about His Holy Sacrament. It is the "mystery of faith," and of our faith we must learn it—that is, we must know all the Catholic Church teaches us about the nature of our Lord's presence. We must also know what is His dignity, and what are His rights; we must understand what is the object of His coming amongst us, and why He "delights to be with the children of men," and what it is that He expects us to do.

The Catechism tells us that "the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist is the true Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, under the appearances of bread and wine." Consider the force of this word *true*. It is the true Body of our Lord, because it is not His Body merely as a figure or representation. You might say of a statue or a picture that it was the Body of our Lord—that His arms were extended and His sacred Head crowned with thorns; but you would never think of calling it the true Body—it is only the representation of that true Body; but the Holy Sacrament is the thing itself—that very same true Body which was once betrayed in the garden of Gethsemane, and delivered up for us to "death, even the death of the cross."

In the Holy Sacrament our Lord continues His Incarnation; He does not renew it. He does not become again incarnate; but He gives once more to His people that same Blessed Body which suffered and rose again, and is now placed at the right hand of God in heaven. To use the words of the Church's hymn :

*Ave verum corpus natum, de Maria Virgine.*

"Hail, true Body, born of the Virgin Mary, which truly suffered and was sacrificed on the cross for man, from whose pierced side issued water and blood, be to us a comfort at the hour of death. O merciful! O tender! O Jesus, Son of Mary!"

Our Lord is in the midst of us in the Holy Sacrament as He was in the midst of His apostles; but the manner of His Presence is changed. He was then mortal and passible—that is, able to suffer and to die. He was One “tempted in all things like as we are, without sin.” He chose to bear pain and weariness, cold and hunger, and would take His share of all the other infirmities that men have to suffer; but now He is immortal and glorified. Christ was “to suffer, and so to enter into His glory;” and from the moment of that glorious rising “death hath no more dominion over Him,” and pain or weakness cannot come near Him.

In the Holy Sacrament our Lord is in the world, but the world has no hold on Him; it may insult and defy Him, but it cannot lay hands on Him. Any outrage that may be offered to the Blessed Sacrament is, indeed, a terrible thing, because it displays the sacrilegious malice of men; but it cannot in any way really injure our Lord, because He is glorified and immortal, and beyond the reach of human power. He simply passes through the midst of them, as He did from the men of Nazareth, when “they rose and thrust Him out of the city; and they brought Him to the brow of the hill, whereon their city was built, that they might cast Him down headlong; but He, passing through the midst of them, went His way” (St. Luke iv. 29). Again, it seems shocking that any accident should happen to the Blessed Sacrament—that, for instance, the church in which it is received should be burnt, and the Sacred Species consumed. Such an event would be painful to the feelings of Christians; but, in reality, if there were no sin, no disrespect and ingratitude, no neglect on the part of men, nothing that happened could be the smallest injury to our Lord. The flames are but His creatures and do His will, and His glorified Body is beyond the power of material things, and is untouched by the elements that men fear—the “fire, hail, snow, ice, stormy winds, which fulfil His Word” (Ps. cxlviii. 8).

The one thing that by which men can harm Him is sin; and, although the Almighty God in His mercy speaks of sin as if it were an injury done to Himself, in reality the



injury done falls back on the sinner; and all the iniquities of mankind together, and all the blasphemies ever uttered by men, cannot really take anything from God, or interfere in the least with His eternal blessedness.

The Body of our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament is glorified, and His Presence is supernatural. Whilst He was living upon earth with His apostles, He was here naturally—that is, His Body had all the properties, the size, shape, and appearance which naturally belonged to the condition He had assumed. He saw and heard as men see and hear, and moved from place to place as we do. He was conformed in all things to the natural laws which regulate bodies on earth, except when He chose in some miraculous manner to suspend their force, as when He walked upon the sea, or was transfigured in the sight of His apostles. In the Blessed Sacrament, however, our Lord is present with another kind of existence, and one which we cannot understand. He is truly and really present, but He is present wholly and completely in every portion of the Sacred Host—in a manner which is supernatural, and belongs to a higher kind of being, of which we have no experience or comprehension. So St. Thomas says: *Fracto demum Sacramento, ne vacilles sed memento, tantum esse sub fragmento, quantum toto tegitur.* “When the Sacrament is broken, doubt not, but remember that there is under the fragment all that was concealed in the whole.”

Our Lord sees and hears us, too, in the Blessed Sacrament; but He needs not the exercise of the senses in a natural way. “He that planted the ear, shall He not hear? or He that formed the eye, doth He not consider?” (Ps. xciii. 9). Everything about our Lord’s existence and action in the Holy Sacrament is supernatural and miraculous. All this is hard to understand, and quite impossible to realize; but in a certain way it explains to us how our Lord is present on a thousand altars at once, and gives Himself in Communion, at the same moment, to hundreds and thousands of His children.

But the Catechism goes on to tell us that the True Body of Christ is there, “under the appearances of bread

and wine." To our senses, we have before us mere bread and wine; every outward quality and property of bread and wine remains; everything that can be tested by our senses is there—" *Visus, tactus, gustus in Te fallitur*"—"sight, touch, and taste are deceived in Thee." These outward things—the "accidents," as they are called—are the signs under which, not bread, but the Body of the Lord, lies hid. "*Sub diversis speciebus, signis tantum et non rebus latent res eximie.*"

Here beneath these signs are hidden

Priceless things to sense forbidden—

Signs, not things, are all we see.

The bread to be consecrated must be bread made of wheat, and the wine must be wine of the grape. These are the elements which our Lord has been pleased to select. The bread used in the Latin Church is unleavened—that is, bread made without any yeast; and it is, moreover, bread made in the shape of a wafer. All this, however, is merely matter of discipline, ordained by the Church for convenience, and according to ancient usage. Mass is said in many countries according to the Eastern rites, and in some of these leavened bread is used for the Holy Sacrifice; but any kind of wheaten bread is valid matter for the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist.

Let us pause to consider why our Lord has chosen these outward appearances of bread and wine. He would hide Himself in His own creation, so as to be constantly in the midst of us, as God and man, in the human nature which He had taken. Why did He assume the lowly form of bread and wine? He came to be our food, that by entering into this intimate union with us, He might nourish and support our spiritual life. To carry out this purpose, He must hide Himself under the form of the food suited to our nature. He might have come amongst us in the shape the Holy Spirit assumed on the day of Pentecost, and have appeared in "parted tongues, as it were, of fire;" but such a form would have been inconsistent with the gracious purpose for which He remained amongst men. He therefore chose for Himself the form of the simplest, the most universal, the most necessary

food by which human life is supported. Bread is the common food of all—of the rich as well as the poor, of the strong as well as the weak; it is the food of man, from youth to age—the food of which we never weary, and therefore it is the best fitted to represent the “Bread of Angels,” the “Food of Eternal Life.”

But now let us ask, How is it that our Lord comes down amongst us in this marvellous way, and resides in the midst of us, and yet there is nothing to show that He has come? Our senses give no warning of the wonderful change that has taken place; the bread that was on the altar has disappeared, and under its outward shape the Lord of Glory lies hid. Angels adore and wonder at the miracle of God’s power; but mortal eye cannot perceive the great change that has been accomplished. Why has our Lord given us no sign of His coming, by which we might know Him? Our Lord came to hide Himself in His creation, and not to destroy the natural order which He had established. He willed, therefore, that His coming should be the “Mystery of Faith,” and that all the laws of nature should continue their course, before the eyes of men, uninterrupted by His coming. When it has been His pleasure to do so, He has interrupted those laws, as He did in the many miracles which He worked upon earth; but such miraculous interferences, of their own nature and purpose, can only be occasional, and therefore our Lord allows all things, in appearance, to go on as if He were not present.

Our Lord leaves us to the exercise of that virtue which is specially suited to our condition upon earth—the virtue of faith. “Because thou hast seen me, Thomas, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and have believed” (St. John xx. 29). These words are consoling and instructive to us. Great, my brethren, would have been the happiness of seeing with mortal eyes the glorious Body which Jesus had raised from the tomb; but it is a greater happiness still, He Himself tells us, to believe without seeing. If it were possible for our Lord to display His Presence on our altars in a miraculous manner, without changing the whole course of human

events which His Providence has designed, still He would deprive our devotion of all the merit which is now its great privilege. If we could see upon the altar Jesus in His glory, as the angels do, our reverence and adoration would almost be, as theirs is, a matter of necessity.

No thanks to us if we adore the Lord of Glory when His Presence is obvious to our senses; but if we honour our hidden Lord, whom we know only by faith and love, then, indeed, we make an offering dear and acceptable to Him.

And what is the honour due to our Lord in the Holy Sacrament? Wherever He is, whether in glory or humiliation, whether on His heavenly throne or in the earthly tabernacle in which He reposes, He is the "King of kings and Lord of lords." He is the "image of the Invisible God—the first-born of every creature; for in Him were all things created in heaven and earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominations, or principalities or powers—all things were created by Him and in Him; and He is before all, and by Him all things consist. And He is the Body of the Church, who is the beginning, the first-born from the dead, that in all things He may hold the primacy" (Col. i. 15).

The most profound adoration, the most perfect love that man can give, fall far short of what is due to our Lord in the Sacrament of the Altar. The respect and reverence which are paid to the mightiest monarch upon earth—the devotion and love which we owe to all the saints in heaven, even including that surpassing homage which is the privilege of the Blessed Mother of God—all these together are as nothing compared to the reverence and love due to our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. Him we worship as the Mighty God, who deigns to veil His Majesty from our eyes under these humble veils; whilst we reverence and honour them, however great they may be, only as His creatures. They, like ourselves, are but dust and ashes before Him, and are "counted as nothing" in His Presence; they, like ourselves, can only cry out, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, who was and who is, and who is to come!" and "The Lamb that was



slain is worthy to receive power, and divinity, and wisdom, and strength, honour, and glory, and benediction" (Apoc. v. 12).

We ought all, my dear brethren, to have a great feeling of the reverence and love which our Lord, in the Holy Sacrament, claims from us. There are many devotions in the Catholic Church to which some are specially attracted, whilst others have no particular feeling about them; to the Blessed Sacrament of the altar *everyone* is bound to have a special devotion, and in every congregation the Confraternity of the Blessed Sacrament should be the first to be established, and everywhere the outward ceremonial in honour of our Lord's presence should hold the highest place.

The Catholic Church has a number of usages which are intended to bring home to our minds the reverence due to our Lord in the Holy Eucharist. Wherever the Blessed Sacrament is reserved a lamp is kept burning, day and night, to remind us of the Divine Presence. Whenever we pass before the tabernacle, we are instructed to make a genuflection in His honour; whenever His priests, in the course of their functions, have to come specially into His presence, they have to put on the stole, which is the badge of their office, like ministers solemnly entering into the presence of royalty. When the Blessed Sacrament is upon the altar, or, more solemnly still, when it is placed upon the throne above the tabernacle, the candles are lighted, to be, as it were, a guard of honour around Him, and, to our fancy at least, to represent the angels who surround His heavenly throne. The priest offers incense before Him on bended knees, and, when He moves from place to place, the bell is rung, that all may kneel to do Him honour. All these usages, and a thousand more, are intended to remind us of the infinite reverence due to Him in all times and places, that familiarity may never make us forget what belongs to Him as our Sovereign Lord.

Our first duty, then, in approaching the Holy Sacrament, if we would not "eat and drink judgment to ourselves," is faithfully and truly to discern the Body of the

Lord. We must, by a lively and well-instructed faith, discern our Lord really present, true God and true man, whole and undivided, in His glorified humanity; and, at the same time, we must have a deep feeling of what is due to Him from us. We must, moreover, discern plainly what is the object of His coming. Why is it that He remains here in the midst of us? The Catechism says: "Christ has given Himself to us in this Sacrament to be the life and food of our souls." "He that eateth me, the same also shall live by me." "He that eateth this bread shall live for ever." If we do not understand the need that we have of spiritual nourishment, we shall never hunger as we ought after this heavenly bread. "He hath filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He hath sent empty away" (St. Luke i. 53). We cannot be said truly and sufficiently to discern the Body of the Lord unless we also feel the need that we have of His Divine Sacrament for our food.

But how are we to "discern the Body of the Lord"? Not by understanding only. We must, indeed, diligently study all that the Church teaches, but we must also learn with our hearts. "Thou hast hidden these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them to little ones" (St. Luke x. 21). It is by prayer and meditation that we can best discern the Body of the Lord. Fervent and humble prayer at the feet of Jesus in the tabernacle will teach us more of His Real Presence, of His greatness and goodness, and of our duties to Him, than we could learn anywhere else. Our Lord has given Himself to us wholly and entirely in the Blessed Sacrament; it should be our desire, in return, to give ourselves wholly to Him, in mind and in heart, in body and in soul.

I will conclude with some beautiful words of St. John Chrysostom, who was Patriarch of Constantinople in the fifth century: "Dearly beloved, it behoveth us to learn the miracle of the mysteries—what the gift is, and why it was given, and what is the use thereof. We being many, are one body,' saith the apostle Paul (1 Cor. x. 17); and again, 'We are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones' (Eph. v. 30). Only the initiated

will now understand what I say : that this union may take place, not by love only, but verily and indeed we ought to mingle our own with His flesh. And this may be done by eating that food which He hath given unto us, being fain to manifest that exceeding great love which He beareth to us-ward. To this end He hath mingled Himself with us, and infused His Body into our bodies, that we may be one together, like as the limbs of a man, and His head are all of one body. Such union do they long for that love much.

“When we come back from that table, we ought to be like so many lions breathing fire, dreadful to the devil. Our thoughts ought to be concentrated on our great Head, and the love which He showeth us. Many fathers and mothers there are who give their children to others to nurse ; but I, saith the Lord to the children, I am not so, but I feed you with mine own flesh, and join myself to you, fain that ye should all be sons of noble blood now, and giving you a noble hope of that which ye shall be hereafter. I was content to be your Brother ; I, for your sakes, have taken unto me flesh and blood, and that flesh and blood, wherein I am become your Brother, the same I give in turn unto you.

“Let us, then, dearly beloved brethren, take good heed to ourselves, as unto the holders of so great mercies, and when any foul word springeth to our lips, or we feel anger taking possession of us, or the sting of any other sinful passion, let us call to mind of what we have been counted worthy, and let that remembrance still the unruly motion. As often as we take that Body, as often as we taste that Blood, let us think how that we feed on Him who is sitting on high, adored of angels, at the right hand of the Eternal Power.”

“Ah, me! how many a way is opened to us whereby we may be saved! He hath made us His, He hath given His Body to us, and still we are not turned away from evil!” (*Brerian Lesson—Marquis of Bute’s Translation*).

# Catholic Sermons

BY REV. J. B. BAGSHAWE.

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## SERMON LIV.

### *The Passion.*

"I judged not myself to know anything among you but Jesus Christ, and Him crucified" (1 Cor. ii. 2).

WE are now entering upon the sacred season of the Passion. On this Sunday, my dear brethren, the Church begins her solemn mourning for her crucified Head—she puts off her splendid attire, and clothes herself in purple, and, in sign of mourning, veils all the statues and images around her walls, and even the crucifix itself. This is the season during which we are specially to meditate on the sufferings of Christ, and, in loving contemplation, to join our hearts to those of all His faithful followers. It is not as if the Passion were ever to be out of our thoughts—at all times and seasons Jesus crucified ought to be with us. If we triumph and rejoice at His resurrection, or are full of tenderness at His nativity, we must still keep His cross before us, so as to rejoice with Jesus crucified as well as mourn with Him, and thus try, with the apostle, to know nothing but Jesus, and Him crucified.

The essential characteristic of a good Christian is to be a lover of the cross, and a follower of Jesus crucified. The cross, from the beginning, had been "unto the Jews indeed a stumbling-block, and unto the Gentiles foolishness, but unto them that are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1 Cor. i. 23). As it was then, it is now; the mystery of Christ crucified is a scandal and a shock to the world. There are numbers of respectable, good people, who think themselves sincere Christians, who, nevertheless, keep far away from the cross of Christ; they may speak of it in general terms, but they have no desire to come near and meditate upon our Lord's sufferings. They do not wish



to stand at the foot of the cross with the faithful band who were stationed there, but rather join with the world in taking scandal at all that our Lord did and suffered, and like to hear as little as possible about it. Let it not be so with us, my dear brethren, but let us be sure that there is no true holiness or peace except at the foot of the cross, and that, if "you are partakers of the sufferings, so shall you also be of the consolation" (2 Cor. i. 7).

Our Lord has made His Passion the special object of meditation for His followers. His whole life was to be a model, but all the lessons of His life were renewed, and, as it were, crowded together into the time of His Passion, to be the one great lesson which Christians should learn. "Christ also suffered for us, leaving you an example that you should follow His steps, who did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth; who, when He was reviled, did not revile; when He suffered, He threatened not, but delivered Himself to him that judged Him unjustly; who, in His own self, bore our sins in His body upon the tree; that we, being dead to sins, should live to justice; by whose stripes you were healed" (1 St. Peter ii. 21).

Our Lord's Passion is a pattern, and how are we to copy it? It is the pattern of all virtues, and for all mankind; it is the highest standard of perfection which the saints can find to imitate, and it is, at the same time, the first lesson for beginners, from which alone they can learn the spirit of Jesus. How, then, is it to be learned? Not by a mere hasty glance. How do men learn from the copies set before them of human things? They do not look and pass by—they make their model a careful study, and give their best attention to every part. The painter studies every line, and dwells upon every shade, of the copy before him, and he sees in his model a thousand things which a passing observer would never notice; and so he catches something of the spirit of that which he has been copying. So should it be with us, my dear brethren; we must not be content with a hasty glance, but pause to go deeply into everything that happened in the Passion, that we may sympathize with our Lord, and learn the lessons He is teaching.

This is precisely what the Catholic Church urges upon us at all times, and particularly during Lent. We have had proposed to us, every week, some special part of the Passion; the prayer in the garden, the crown of thorns, the lance and nails, the five wounds, the Precious Blood—all these are put before us separately and specially, that we may learn to copy our Lord in His Passion, not only in general, but in detail.

But there are two ways of studying the Passion; friends and enemies both looked on whilst Jesus was suffering. "And they watched Him"—the cruel mob of soldiers around His cross watched Him just as the chosen few at the foot of the cross did; but, oh, how great was the difference! Some of that crowd looked on with envy, malice, and hatred; many more, perhaps, were hardened and indifferent, and most of those who looked on were very far from understanding the depth of the mysteries they beheld, so that "seeing, they did not see, and hearing, they did not understand." So it is now; there are vast numbers of people who look on, and speak of the Passion, but have very little love for Jesus crucified in their hearts, to whom the cross is a stumbling-block and foolishness. Around the cross the company which was once present is still to be found. We may still find the representatives of the fierce Jews, uttering frantic blasphemies against God and His Christ, and with all their might, denying and rejecting their Saviour. There are still many, like the hardened Roman soldiers and executioners, who look on indifferently, "caring for none of these things." They are full of themselves and their affairs, and have no thought or feeling to give to our Lord on His cross. Many, too, can be found, like the fickle and thoughtless crowd, swayed by every idle word, just like the populace, who were ready one day to cry, "Hosannah to the Son of David," and were equally ready a few days later to shout, "Away with Him, crucify Him!"

Our business, then, my dear brethren, at this holy season, is to take part in the Passion of our Lord in an earnest, loving spirit; we must meditate upon His suf-

ferings with loving eyes and compassionate hearts. But we must remember also to look at His Passion with the eyes of faith. It is not a mere scene of human suffering which we are to contemplate—it is the Son of God engaged, for our sakes, in a great work of love and suffering, in which we are sharers.

We must not consider ourselves as mere spectators, as if we were listening to an old history long since passed and gone. Jesus is the “Lamb slain from the beginning of the world,” and His Passion is ever new; it is repeated before the eyes of every age, and men of all generations are called upon to take a part. Whenever the year brings round the commemoration of our Lord’s Passion, it is as if we were solemnly invited to take a share in the great work which the Son of God came to do amongst men; we are called on to take our part, one side or the other, with Heaven or hell—with Him or His enemies.

We must take care, then, not to take a mere human view of all the things presented before our eyes, but see in everything the “determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God” (Acts ii. 23). “He was offered up because He Himself willed it,” and every detail of His Passion, every ingredient of His bitter chalice, was His own will. Everything that He did, too, was of infinite value—every word that He said carried with it an immense weight—every suffering was of infinite price, having a value arising from the infinite dignity of the Divine Person who condescended to suffer.

We must, then, follow our Lord in spirit during these days through all the scenes of His Passion—from His solemn entering into Jerusalem until all “was consummated” on the cross—and in every part we shall find something to speak to our imaginations and our feelings, and also something that we may use as an example for ourselves.

Let us take some scenes for special consideration to-day; and nothing will be more appropriate to begin with than the treason of Judas, by which our Lord was delivered into the hands of His enemies. Our Lord chose



to begin His Passion alone. It was to be His own work, and He would not wait for the hour in which He was to be delivered into the hands of men. The solitary agony which Jesus suffered in the garden, when His "soul was sorrowful even unto death," was the first and bitterest part of His Passion; but its formal commencement was when He said, "arise, let us go: behold, he is at hand that will betray me," and, "as He yet spoke, behold Judas, one of the twelve, came, and with him a great multitude with swords and clubs, sent from the chief priests and ancients of the people. And he that betrayed Him gave them a sign, saying, Whomsoever I shall kiss that is He: hold Him fast. And forthwith coming to Jesus, he said, Hail, Rabbi, and he kissed Him. And Jesus said to him, Friend, whereto art thou come? Then they came up and laid hands on Jesus and held Him" (St. Matt. xxvi. 46).

Let us consider well this scene. The Garden of Olives, the place well known to the disciples, where our Lord had been accustomed to lead them to pray, as into a sanctuary, is invaded by an angry and excited mob; its peaceful silence broken by the clash of arms and the shouting of rough voices, whilst, in the torch-light, Judas is seen to come forth, with his smooth tongue and hypocritical smile, "Hail, Rabbi, and he kissed Him!" Let us look at Him well, my dear brethren; it may be that we shall see Him again, or that we have seen Him more than once; or, at any rate, that we have seen His part many times enacted. "Friend, wherefore art thou come?"

Well may Judas have hung his head with shame at these words. The rough soldiers behind him were only too good an answer to our Lord's question, "Wherefore art thou come?" Does not Jesus ask this of us also? With what dispositions do we take part in His Passion? Are we conscious of no hidden treason? Can we look our Lord in the face, and answer for the fidelity and love of our hearts? Do our actions show this fidelity?

It is one of the most distressing considerations in the Passion of our Lord that so large a part of it was brought about by His friends. Those who ought to have been His



faithful friends had the greatest and most effective share in His sufferings. "If my enemy had reviled me, I would verily have borne with it; and if he that hated me had spoken great things against me, I would, perhaps, have hidden myself from him; but thou, a man of one mind, my guide and my familiar!" (Ps. liv. 13). These are the prophetic words which our Lord addresses to Judas and all like him.

The Passion was not brought about by strangers, but by His own people. "He came unto His own, and His own received Him not." The leaders against Him were not ordinary people; they were the priests of God, solemnly dedicated to His service, on whose heads the sacred unction had descended. In the same way, the immediate cause of the Passion was the treason of His own disciple—of one whom He had chosen amongst men to be His apostle, and a priest of the New Law. Without His instrumentality the Passion could not have begun. All the avowed enemies of Jesus could have done nothing against Him, but for the part taken by His own friends. This was what our Lord willed to be the bitterest part of His chalice—that all He was suffering, all the ignominy and cruelty that were heaped upon Him, had their beginning in the actions of His own friends.

Those who ought to have been His friends had the greatest share in the Passion, because what they did was guided by greater knowledge and by greater malignity. The Jews and the chief priests, from their position and knowledge, had the power to offend much more bitterly than mere heathens could have done; and, in the same way, Judas was able to bring to his crime a degree of intensity which was far beyond even the hatred of the Jews.

Consider how many things went to make up the enormity of the sin of Judas. He sinned against light, for he had long been in familiar acquaintance with our Lord; he sinned against express warnings—our Lord had distinctly prophesied to him what was to happen; he sinned with extreme deliberation, and for the meanest motive; and, to crown all, his sin contained in itself the most hardened ingratitude.

It is so in our own day also. A great part of the worst sins committed against our Lord and His Sacraments, and His Holy Church upon earth, are committed by ourselves—at least, it is in a great degree by our fault that they are committed. “Why do the Gentiles rage, and people devise vain things?” The powers of the world can never do much against our Lord, unless some Judas is found to betray Him, or some one in weakness to deny Him, as Peter did? Then it is that the world is armed by our faults and follies, and the Passion of Christ begins.

And the sins that we ourselves commit, are they not the very worst of the injuries offered to our Lord? They generally contain that element of calm deliberation which was the peculiarity of the sin of Judas. The sins of Christians are, in a special manner, sins against light and grace, and therefore, in themselves, constitute the worst offences committed against God; and the sins of Christians, moreover, “give occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme” (2 Kings xii. 13).

Let us now look at the streets of Jerusalem on that night, as they might have appeared to the angel of God. There is the mob, with lanterns and torches, with swords and clubs, surrounding the gentle figure of Jesus, and urging Him on through the streets, from one tribunal to another. No time is to be lost, no hour is too late, no season too sacred—He must at once be carried before the tribunal of the Jews, and must be condemned. He goes before Annas and Caiphas, and each, in turn, tries what he can do to find evidence to condemn Him. “And the chief priests and the whole council sought false witness against Jesus, that they might put Him to death; and they found not, though many false witnesses had come in” (St. Matt. xxvi. 59).

All the evidence that they could bring against Him was insufficient. “And the High Priest said to Him, I adjure thee by the Living God, that thou tell me if thou be the Christ the Son of God. Jesus said to him, Thou hast said it; nevertheless, I say to you, hereafter you shall see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of the

power of God, and coming in the clouds of heaven" (St. Matt. xxvi. 63).

Is not this a wonderful sight, my dear brethren? How must the angels have looked on in amazement? God standing to be judged by His own creatures, ready to receive a sentence of condemnation from their lips! The arrogance with which men set themselves to judge!—the patience with which our Lord suffers it! "It is your hour and the power of darkness." So it is even in the dealings of men with God: they are ever ready to sit in judgment upon their Creator, to find fault with His ways and His Providence, whilst He bears with their short-lived impatience, and judges not before the time.

How ignominious a thing for our Lord to be brought before this tribunal! And yet He suffered it; He desired, for our sakes, to give testimony to the truth, that we might be ready in due time to be witnesses for Him. He knew how hard it would be for us to bear the false accusations, the unjust judgments, the unkind, bitter words of men, and therefore He bore them first for us. It was to be part of the trial of Christians in all times, as it is in our own time, and amongst ourselves, to be spoken of as traitors and malefactors, as seducers and deceivers; and this not only by the crowd, but very often by those whom we are naturally inclined to respect.

Our Lord, therefore, "gave testimony under Pontius Pilate, a good confession," and allowed Himself to be condemned in this ignominious manner by the greatest and most revered tribunal of His own country.

But let us listen to His condemnation, that we may learn the value of this world's judgments. "Then the High Priest rent his garments, saying, He hath blasphemed, what further need have we of witnesses? Behold, now you have heard the blasphemy. What think you? But they answering, said, He is guilty of death. Then did they spit in His face, and buffeted Him, and others struck His face with the palms of their hands, saying, Prophecy unto us, O Christ, who is he that struck thee?" (St. Matt. xxvi. 65).

Let us gaze upon this scene, my dear brethren. If we

do but look upon Jesus as a friend, as one who has loved us, we cannot but be filled with horror at the pain and ignominy heaped upon Him. We cannot but feel for Him as He hears that cruel sentence from the mouth of the chief priest of His people, "Thou art guilty of death," and at the terrible foretaste of death which is given by the rough and cruel treatment of the crowd which surrounds Him. But if we look up higher, by the light of faith, and think what a terrible blasphemy even the least of those words and actions was—that they were falling not merely on the venerable and sacred head of the most pure and holy of the human race, but on One who was true God as well as true man—who, "being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God" (Phil. ii. 6).

And what shall we learn from the example of our Lord? Our first lesson, surely, is not to care too much for the opinions and judgments of men. How often do we allow ourselves to be carried away by the hasty and foolish cries of men?—how often, it may be, have we followed them in condemning the Lord of glory? When good and evil have been brought before us for judgment, have we not often sided with the wrong, because we were too much swayed by the feelings of men?

Our Lord would teach us that our first duty is, on proper occasions, to be able to stand firm against the judgments of this world, and imitate the confession which He made for us. We must imitate Him in His silence and in His gentleness, and also in that firmness with which He bore unmoved the opinions of men, whether they came in the shape of a solemn judgment, or with all the noise and violence of an excited crowd.

There is one more stage of our Lord's Passion which I should like to put before you, my dear brethren, and this is, in some aspects, the most marvellous of all—it is the scourging of our Lord at the pillar. It had been decreed in the eternal counsels of God that Jesus should be obedient unto death, and that His Precious Blood should be poured out as the price of our redemption. "You were not redeemed with corruptible things as gold or silver,



but with the Precious Blood of Christ, as of a lamb unspotted and undefiled" (1 St. Peter i. 19). "Without the shedding of blood, there is no remission" (Heb. ix. 20).

We can understand, therefore, in a manner why our Lord chose to die upon the cross. But why did He please to submit to the gratuitous insult and outrage of His scourging? It was, in itself, almost the greatest degradation which could be inflicted upon man—it was the punishment of a slave—which was considered fit for only the meanest of the human race, so that even St. Paul claimed exemption from it, because he was a Roman citizen; it was, in our Lord's case, particularly ignominious from the way in which it was ordered. "I will chastise Him, therefore, and let Him go" (St. Luke xxiii. 22). Pilate undertakes to correct our Lord, to amend His conduct by this chastisement; and does this by way of gratifying the infuriated rabble. It is difficult to see how any greater affront could be offered to the Son of God than by this hypocritical pretence.

The scourging, too, as carried out, was at once the greatest humiliation and the most grievous torment that can be conceived. Jesus was dragged into the hall of the Pretorium, and there stripped of His garments in the midst of all His enemies; His hands fast bound to the pillar; His virginal flesh torn by the scourges, and His Precious Blood scattered around, on the walls, on the scourges, on the ground, and trodden under foot by the meanest of men. Is it possible for any humiliation to go farther? Who can conceive the agony of shame, grief, and pain which the Sacred Heart of Jesus suffered at this ignominious punishment? And yet this shame was precisely what had been foretold by Him; "the chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we were healed" (Isaias liii. 5); and the Psalmist says: "For I am ready for scourges; I have been scourged all the day, and my chastisement hath been in the mornings" (Ps. xxxvii. 72).

Our Lord bore all this disgrace with a set purpose, and it was to teach us the shame and disgrace of sin. Men think very little of the disgrace of sin, whilst they

magnify the importance of every little injury which is inflicted on their personal dignity and self-esteem. They do not care very much that they have cast dishonour upon their own souls, and defaced the image of God within them; they do not think much of having deeply stained or destroyed the beautiful garment of God's grace; but they are keenly alive to the smallest degradation offered to the body they are so careful about. How could our Lord more effectually teach us that sin is a real disgrace—which must be atoned for by disgrace and shame—than by thus “being ready for scourges,” and bearing “Himself the chastisement of our peace”?

We cannot look at the spectacle of Jesus being scourged at the pillar, and think that each one of the cruel blows which cuts into His sacred flesh, represents sin, and that the ignominy which He is enduring is only the proper punishment of sin, without being stirred up to some sort of feeling of shame for the part that we have had in it. Can we afford to be so very nice, to stand so much on our own personal dignity, and pamper ourselves, as we are inclined to do, when our Lord is taking on Himself the shameful punishment of our sins?

But, let us consider for a moment longer the circumstances of the case. Look at Jesus and that crowd that surrounds Him. It represents the passions and bitterness of the human race. You will see amongst them the fiery and malignant Jew, urged on to hatred by the pride of race and the force of prejudice, ready to pour out the bitterness of his heart on his suffering Lord; you will see the hardened Roman soldier, callous to blood and suffering, accustomed to a thousand deeds of rapine and violence, ready once more to become the instrument of cruelty and tyranny, and men stained with every description of crimes. These are the men who come, one by one, to inflict their cruel blows on the Sacred Body of Jesus. We turn away with horror, as they come forward in long succession to continue their work of cruelty, and shudder to think that our Lord should have allowed such wretches to strike Him. But, after all, are not these the fittest representatives of our sins? How can the sins we

have committed by our pride and rebellion be better represented than by these Jews?—how can the sins of self-indulgence and impurity, and all other sins, be more suitably pictured than by the crowd of hardened men who surround our Lord?

As we gaze on the torment of the scourging, we may well ask ourselves what was it that gave the weight and sting to the blows of these executioners? It was not their power, or the power of darkness—it was the sins of men, in which we have a part. We may recognize our own sins in the blows which are falling, thick and fast, upon His Sacred Body. The sins of pride and wilful disobedience, by which we have cast off His yoke—are not these there? The sins of sensuality and self-indulgence, by which we have sullied our conscience—these, too, have their share in this painful scene. It was to expiate the guilt and shame of such sins that our Lord deigned to submit to the disgrace of being thus publicly scourged.

There is something which gives to our sins a peculiar malignity, and that is the greater knowledge which we possess, and the great deliberation with which we sometimes sin. How much more cruel is the blow which is inflicted by one who knows precisely and clearly the evil he is doing, as we do! Many have, perhaps, offended more grievously, as far as external transgression goes, but there are, perhaps, few who have brought to the commission of sin a more accurate knowledge, and a greater deliberation, than we have.

Then, as we gaze on Jesus suffering this cruel torment, let us think, with sorrow and shame, of the selfishness and pride for which our Lord is bearing His most painful scourging, that by “His stripes we may be healed.”

Oh, then, my dear brethren, let us ask for ourselves, and for all poor sinners, that at this holy time, at least, we may learn to be ashamed of our sins, and to love, as we ought, Him who has taken their burden on Himself.

# Catholic Sermons

BY REV. J. B. BAGSHAWE.

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## SERMON LV.

### *The Stations of the Cross.*

“Let us go forth, therefore, to Him without the camp bearing His reproach.” (Heb. xiii. 13).

WE have now come to the very week of the Passion. Palm Sunday may be considered, my brethren, as the formal and solemn opening of the last scene in our Lord's life. Jesus entered into Jerusalem in triumph as a victor, and “a very great multitude spread their garments in the way, and others cut boughs from the trees, and strewed them in the way: and the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosannah to the Son of David. Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord. Hosannah in the highest” (St. Matt. xxi. 9). The palm branches which the people carried in their hands, and the triumphal shouts of the people, were the signs of His victory. Men do not rejoice in their victory till the battle is over, but it is enough for our Lord that He has begun the battle. “He went forth conquering, to conquer,” and nothing could resist His power.

Yet how meek and lowly was He, even in the moment of His triumph! “Tell ye the daughter of Sion; behold thy King cometh to thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt, the foal of her that is used to the yoke” (St. Matt. xxi. 5). He needs no soldiers, and nothing of the grandeur of this world, for His glorification. He is content with the poor, simple crowd that surrounds Him, and with the voices of the children crying Hosannah before Him, since, in Himself, He has all the dignity and glory, all the power and empire, which the military display, and costly trappings of earthly kings are intended to represent.

We, too, my brethren, have to take our part in our



Lord's triumph. The Church blesses the palms and the branches of trees, and puts them into our hands, that we may carry them before Him, and raise our voices with Hosannah to the Son of David; but we must remember that these palm branches mean victory. He that has fought and conquered with our Lord, or he who intends, however humbly and diffidently, to fight the good fight in His company, may well bear the palm of victory; but the cowardly and the selfish have no right to that glorious emblem.

The palm branch of this day should, then, be to us as a pledge that we will follow our Lord in His conflict, that we will never be ashamed of Him, but take up the cross with Him, "bearing His reproach," so as to be found worthy to share His victory.

That we may learn to take up the cross and follow Jesus, we cannot do better, during this holy season, than give our attention to the Stations of the Cross. This is a devotion much loved and strongly recommended by the Catholic Church, and dear to all the saints. In it we follow our Lord in His journey to Mount Calvary, in company with the holy women who wept over Him, and mark, if we may say so, each one of His footsteps, by dwelling in spirit on all the incidents of the way, till we come to stand at the foot of the cross. There is no better way of meditating on our Lord's Passion, so as to learn a lesson from His every word and action.

You have often, my dear brethren, made this journey in spirit, and it will be suitable to the season of the Passion to go over again some of the thoughts which the devotion is calculated to inspire. There are fourteen Stations, the pictures of which are to be found in almost every church. These make the "Way of the Cross," and we must pause for a moment before each of them, to join our thoughts and our hearts with our Lord, and make Him some suitable offering of prayer.

We begin with the First Station—Jesus is condemned to death. We see our Lord standing before Pontius Pilate, with His hands fast bound, and still wearing His crown of thorns. He is pale, and worn, and covered

with blood; "from the sole of the foot unto the top of the head there is no soundness in Him" (Is. i. 6). And yet He preserves that look of dignity and command which must at all times belong to Him. We can hear the shouts of the mob: "Not this man, but Barabbas!" "Away with Him, away with Him, crucify Him, crucify Him!" "We have no king but Cæsar." Pilate is before us, weak and uncertain, trying to excuse himself, and wishing to keep well with both God and man, if it were possible. "I am innocent of the blood of this just man, look ye to it." "His blood be upon us and upon our children."

Here is the Lord, before whom Pilate himself, and all that crowd, had one day to be judged; before whom we, too, must all appear, one by one—each in his turn; and now He allows Himself to be thus unjustly sentenced, that He may be able to find mercy for us in our day of trouble. Let us listen once more to those shouts; they are not merely the cries of the mob—they are the voices of men's sins, which call for condemnation upon Him who has allowed Himself to be loaded with them. "The Lord hath laid upon Him the iniquity of us all" (Is. liii. 6); and we may, all of us, hear our own sins joining in that clamour, and crying out against Him. For our sake, O Lord, Thou didst bear this unjust sentence; for us wretched sinners, judgment was pronounced against Thee. Remember us, then, in our terrible day, when we are standing before Thy tribunal, and our sins call for condemnation.

But the cross is now brought forward to be laid upon Him. Hard and heavy it is, and painfully does it press on the wounded shoulders of Jesus. He is spent with loss of blood, and exhausted by the pain and fatigue of the weary night He has passed; and yet He takes up the cross cheerfully, and embraces it willingly, because it represents the weight of the sins of men, which He has undertaken to bear. Let us think of the share which we have in laying this burden upon Him; every sin we have committed goes to make up that load which Jesus so lovingly and so cheerfully bears. Should we not, at least, put

out a hand to bear the weight? Should we not be willing to carry some part of the cross? "He that will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me." Now is our time for showing that we are willing to do so.

We come next to one of the incidents recorded by tradition—that, as He was on His way, loaded with the cross, Jesus fell heavily to the ground. The road was rough, and the crowd thronged round Him on all sides; the soldiers were impatient and brutal, and His strength was exhausted. Well might it be so, after all that He had suffered—after the scourging and crowning with thorns, and the long night of pain and sleeplessness which He had passed. So He fell, and that fall opened once more the wounds that were closing, and bruised once more the bruises which He had already received. He fell, that we might not fall. He would bring to our thoughts the misery of the Christian soul falling into sin. When we sin we fall, and the pain which our Lord suffered in His Sacred Body, when crushed upon the ground under the weight of His cross, is only too accurate a representation of the effect that fall produces in the Christian soul, and the pain which our Lord deigns to suffer in sympathy with us. Our Lord fell, that we might rise. Often does it seem that the burden we have to bear is too heavy for us, and that we must fall under it. Well, our Lord condescended to experience the same weakness. We see Him fall, but it is to rise again, and to take up His load once more, to bear it to the end. Shall we not try, at least, to take up our burdens with Him, even if they appear to us too heavy to be borne? They will be light, if only we carry them in company with our Lord Jesus.

But Jesus meets His Blessed Mother on the way. They have been separated during the Passion. It was His will that during His public ministry she should be away from Him, to teach men to break through the ties of flesh and blood; but she had been with Him at the beginning, when He worked His first miracle at Cana, and is now to be with Him at the end. Who can tell what Mary suffered in her absence? She knew of the betrayal;

she knew of the scourging ; she had heard the shouts of the multitude, and her heart had gone with Him through it all ; but now she is to see Him face to face. She sees the Son of Nazareth, “beautiful above the sons of men” (Ps. xliv. 3), whom she had seen so lovely, so commanding, so endearing—her Lord, and, at the same time, her Son ; she sees Him now, bending under the weight of the cross. His face is pale and bruised ; on His brow He bears the thorny crown, and from every thorn which pierces His head, the blood trickles down. How shall she bear to meet Him thus ? The sight of His suffering is that sword of grief which was foretold to her by Simeon, and deeply does that sword now force its way into her heart.

What meeting could be more tender, yet more painful, than this between the Son and His Mother ? Jesus knew how deep would be the wound which the sight of His pain would inflict on His Blessed Mother ; yet He willed it to be so, that she might be the Queen of Sorrows, and that, by sharing in His Passion, she might be the Mother of sinners. How often have we, her other children, whom Jesus gave to her upon His cross, renewed the sorrow of that moment, when we have presented ourselves before her as unworthy Christians and rebellious children, disgraced and bowed down by the burden of the sins we have ourselves committed ?

By the agony of that moment, let us entreat our Blessed Mother to help us to look on the saving wounds of Jesus with her loving eye, that His suffering countenance may be deeply impressed upon our hearts. *Sancta Mater istud agas, crucifigi fige plagas, cordi meo valide*—“Holy Mother, imprint deeply on my heart the wounds of thy crucified Son.”

“And going out, they found a man of Cyrene, named Simon : him they forced to take up His cross” (St. Matt. xxvii. 32). Our Lord could no longer bear His cross without help, so the Jews compelled a man whom they met on the way to carry it for Him. This Simon of Cyrene bore the cross, indeed, but only did so because he couldn’t help it, and may be taken as the pattern of all



those who bear their crosses unwillingly and without profit. We all of us have to suffer in some way; but a great many do so unwillingly, and repine and murmur at every trial; they suffer, indeed, because it is the inevitable lot of men, but they have no share in the happiness of bearing our Lord's cross, since, like Simon of Cyrene, it is only because they cannot escape from it.

Is it not true, my dear brethren, that many of us have to suffer enough to make us saints, if only we bore it well? The sight of Jesus carrying it with so much pain ought to do something, at least, to make us love the cross, and glory in it. "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Gal. 14). So says St. Paul; but can we pretend to glory in it, if we are so very impatient of everything we ourselves have to suffer? If we have not the courage to love the cross, and, as our Lord tells us, to "take up our cross daily," let us learn, from Simon's example, to bear the necessary trials of life, and the trouble of all necessary duties, with patience and cheerfulness, and an earnest desire to unite what we have to bear, to our Lord's heavy cross, and to carry it with Him.

We next come to a very touching incident of our Lord's sad journey. The holy woman named Veronica was one of those who had followed Jesus grieving; she saw His face covered with blood, and the toil-drops gathering on His brow as He laboured under His cross.

She made her way through the crowd, and offered Him a towel to wipe His face—she thought nothing of the soldiers or of the bystanders—she cared nothing for what people would say—but considered only the compassion and tenderness she felt for Him. It was a trifling thing after all; but Jesus stopped, and accepted her offering. He could not do otherwise, because it was the offering of a loving heart. Will not our Lord accept our offering also? There is no act of piety or kindness so small that Jesus will refuse it: the cup of cold water given to the poor for His sake—the act of mortification or self-denial done in His honour—the fervent prayer or act of devotion which we make in memory of His sufferings—all these He will accept, as He did St. Veronica's

handkerchief. This we know very well; yet, how seldom do we make such offerings? At least, let us offer the good works, the prayers, the visits to the Blessed Sacrament, the mortifications which are required of us during this Holy Week: they are not great things, but loving hearts will secure their acceptance.

But we return once more to our Lord's painful journey, and again see Him fall under His cross. What does this second and most painful fall suggest to us? Is it not the evil done by the relapsing sinner, who, when he has been forgiven and clothed anew in the garment of grace, falls, again and again, into the same sin? "Who have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the world to come, and are fallen away . . . crucifying again the Son of God and making Him a mockery" (Heb. vi. 6). How often have we committed this evil, and, after penance and the "good word of God," have returned to our evil ways? And it is not as if this were simply the consequence of human frailty; it is, generally, because we have not been in earnest in avoiding it. If men really meant to keep out of sin, and used ordinary pains to seek the proper remedies, there would be very few relapsing sinners. Let us, then, see our Lord covered with fresh blood from this second fall, and think that He bore it as a special atonement for the injury which we have offered to God by many repeated acts of sin—by sinning, again and again, with such faint efforts at amendment.

Our Lord next speaks to the women of Jerusalem, who have followed Him sorrowing; and the words which He addresses to them are the only stern words that He utters during the course of His Passion. "Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not over me, but weep for yourselves and for your children . . . for, if in the green wood they do these things, what shall be done in the dry?" (St. Luke xxiii. 28.) Our Lord's Passion is a lesson, and He would have us read it aright. It is not merely a touching spectacle which calls for our sympathy. The words which He now speaks He means for all the sinners of the earth. He would have them look at Him and learn

the justice of God. "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the Living God" (Heb. ix. 31).

If sin is an evil so great, that this most painful sacrifice is required to purchase mercy for sinners, what will be the fate of those who, in disdain or by impenitence, reject the mercy offered to them? If the Lamb, who was without sin, must pay such a price for the iniquities of others, which He has undertaken to discharge, what will become of those who are sinners themselves if they fall into the hands of God's justice?

Truly, there is nothing which can make us realize so vividly the enormity of sin and the severity of Infinite Justice, as the sight of the Passion of our Lord. How long and how often, my dear brethren, have we looked at Jesus suffering? Can we say that we have learned the lesson which He teaches us? or do we still need the stern words which He here addresses to the women of Jerusalem?

But now our Lord's painful journey is ended, and He falls for the third time, His labour is done, and His strength is exhausted. He has come to the place where He is to die, and He can no longer support the weight of His cross. Truly, it is a wonderful thing, in the eyes of Faith, to see Jesus thus spent and exhausted! He, the "Word made Flesh—He, "in whose hands are empire and dominion"—without whom "was made nothing that was made"—has now become quite powerless!

He has taken upon Himself our nature, and with it our weakness; He would taste to the uttermost the misery of feebleness and helplessness. How many of our sins come from weakness? We sin by yielding to the frailty of our nature, and our Lord had compassion on us, and took our weakness upon Himself, that He might "give us power to become the sons of God," and that He might enable us, by His grace, to rise superior to the miseries and frailty of flesh and blood. When we see our Lord thus exhausted for our sakes, we must take courage, and be resolved to fight hard against human weakness in the strength which His grace supplies to us.

“They divided His garments, casting lots, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, They divided my garments among them, and upon my vesture they cast lots” (St. Matt. xxvii. 35). The Station which we have now reached shows us Jesus in the midst of His enemies, cruelly and roughly stripped of His garments. We can fancy how great was the pain He suffered when His wounds were again opened by this rough treatment, and how the blood began once more to flow; but who can tell how deeply He feels the indignity to which He is exposed? No one but our Lord Himself could possibly understand the reverence which belonged to Him; and every insult, every reproachful word, must have been more painful to Him than we can conceive. How keenly, then, must He have felt the shame and insult of being thus publicly exposed to the derision of His enemies! But this outrage, also, was the appropriate punishment of the iniquities He had taken upon Himself, and He would not spare Himself.

Sinners seek to hide themselves; they would cover up their crimes, and hide them even from their own eyes. The day will come, however, when all the veils which cover our sins—all the pretences and excuses by which we deceive ourselves and others—will be stripped off, and we shall be covered with confusion. It will, indeed, be a terrible shame and disgrace to us if we have to stand as criminals, with all our sins upon us, before the tribunal of that God in whose eyes “all things are naked and open;” and it was to spare us from the confusion of that day that our Lord bore thus to be rudely stripped on Mount Calvary. To save us He “endured the cross, despising the shame” (Heb. xii. 2), and this was the beginning of the shame of the cross. Can we see Him bearing it without being resolved, if necessary, to endure cheerfully some little reproach for His name’s sake?

When stripped of His garments, Jesus is laid down upon the cross, which is the altar of His sacrifice. “He was offered because it was His own will” (Is. liii. 7). This was the altar which He had chosen for Himself, and on it He is laid as a victim. He lifts His eyes to the



Eternal Father, and offers, in sacrifice for the sins of men, the pain He has to bear, the blood He is to shed, and the death He is to undergo. How often had this sacrifice been represented even from the beginning of the world ! How many sacrifices had been offered to God in ages past, which were pleasing to Him, simply because they represented "the Lamb slain from the beginning of the world !" How often, again, was this sacrifice to be renewed upon our altars even to the end of time !

He Himself was the High Priest as well as the Victim of the sacrifice. "I lay down my life, that I may take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down myself" (St. John x. 17). It is He who, by the hands of cruel men, offers Himself for us, and willingly does He stretch out His hands to receive the nails which are to fasten Him to the cross. He suffers the torment of these nails with joy, because, by them, He is to fasten to the cross the "handwriting of the decree that was against us" (Col. ii. 14). He stretches forth His hands to receive the nails, and they are driven through His hands and feet into the wood of the cross, crushing and tearing His sacred flesh in their passage. Oh, Christians, let us listen to the sound of those blows which tell us that Jesus is irrevocably fastened to the cross ! When Abraham was commanded to sacrifice the son whom he loved, and the victim was bound upon the altar, even when the sword was raised to strike, an angel came to stay the father's hand. God was satisfied by his obedience. But Jesus is "obedient unto death, even the death of the cross ;" and these nails bear witness to the irrevocable decree of love by which He is fastened to the cross, until all is consummated.

Can we look at the complete and loving sacrifice of Himself which Jesus makes, and not feel that we are called upon to make sacrifices for Him also ? We have not "resisted unto blood, fighting against sin," and if we had done so, it would be but little in proportion to what He has done for us.

But now comes the closing scene. "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all things to myself"

(St. John xii. 32). His cross has been raised from the ground, and for three hours Jesus is to hang upon it—"a spectacle to angels and to men." "All the day long I have extended my hands to a people that believeth not; and contradicteth me" (Rom. x. 21). His body is racked and distorted with pain—pain from His smarting wounds, pain from the racking of every limb, pain from the burning thirst which parches Him, and the deadly faintness which creeps over Him. And His Body does not suffer alone; He will not spare His sacred soul. His Passion began with mental agony; and it was His will that it should conclude in utter abandonment and desolation, so that His human nature should taste the cup of death even to the dregs. "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (St. Matt. xxvii. 46).

"I will draw all things to myself." Draw us to Thy cross, we beseech thee, O Lord. How wonderful has been the power of that crucified Form over the hearts of men! What a powerful attraction have that bowed head and those extended arms exercised upon mankind! Martyrs and confessors, men and women, all ages and ranks, have been drawn away from everything this world could give, to the foot of that cross. It is the place for sinners. There we can best repent of our sins; there we can best wash them away in that cleansing Blood, for the "Blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanseth us from all sin" (1 St. John i. 7). There is St. Mary Magdalen, the very pattern of penitents, and there, too, we must find our place.

The foot of the cross is the school of all virtues; where else did the saints learn the indefatigable zeal, the tenderness and self-devotion by which their lives were distinguished? Their constant desire was to stand at the foot of the cross with Mary, and to suffer and learn with her. "*Juxta crucem tecum stare, et me tibi sociare, in planctu desidero.*" "My desire is to stand beside the cross with thee, and to unite my sorrow with thine." Such was the sentiment that filled the hearts of all the saints.

At the foot of the cross all Christian virtues grow and

are perfected. The Precious Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ is like the heavenly dew which falls upon the earth, and alone gives fertility to the soil. Then let us take our place at the foot of the cross, and pray that there love and self-devotion may spring up even in the barren soil of our hearts.

“It is consummated.” Everything has been done by Almighty God for the salvation of men. Abundantly, and more than abundantly, has Jesus purchased for us redemption and sanctifying grace, and it remains for us to see that this grace is not purchased for us in vain. “It is consummated.” Our Lord has drained to the dregs the cup of grief and suffering, and “Jesus, again crying with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost. And behold the veil of the Temple was rent in two, from the top even to the bottom, and the earth quaked and the rocks were rent” (St. Matt. xxvii. 50).

Let us pass on from this scene of external confusion to gaze for a moment at the desolation of the Blessed Mother of God. The body of Jesus was taken down from the cross and placed lifeless in her arms. “Oh, all you that pass by the way, attend and see if there be any sorrow like to my sorrow” (Lament. i. 12). The sword of grief which Simeon had foretold, passes through and through the heart of Mary, as she gazes on the lifeless body of her Son, and counts over the wounds with which it is pierced. And the body of Jesus is laid in the sepulchre. Our Lord died and was buried that He might rise in glory. He was buried to cast a ray of His brightness upon that dark grave which is waiting to receive us. Oh, my brethren, let us learn to follow in the footsteps of our Lord Jesus, and so live with Him and die with Him, that we may deserve to be partakers of His glorious Resurrection

# Catholic Sermons

BY REV. J. B. BAGSHAWE.

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## SERMON LVI.

### *Christ Risen.*

"Why seek you the living with the dead? He is not here, but He is risen" (St. Luke xxiv. 6).

On this day, my dear brethren, we are to rejoice with our risen Lord. Let us begin early, and set out for the sepulchre with the holy women. "And when the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalen, and Mary the mother of James and Salome bought sweet spices, that coming they might anoint Jesus. And very early in the morning, the first day of the week, they came to the sepulchre, the sun being now risen. And they said one to another, Who shall roll us back the stone from the door of the sepulchre? And looking, they saw the stone rolled back. For it was very great. And entering into the sepulchre, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, clothed with a white robe, and they were astounded. Who saith to them, Be not affrighted. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is risen; He is not here. Behold the place where they laid Him" (St. Mark xvi. 6).

How lovingly, and yet how sadly, these holy women went! They had bought sweet spices, the best and most precious things they could provide, and they would not lose a moment in making their offering of love. They set out in the early dawn, with heavy hearts, full of regrets and tenderness. They were oppressed by many fears, and saw many difficulties. "Who shall roll away the stone?" But love was strong enough to overcome all obstacles, and to brave all dangers. And their sorrow is changed into joy. He whom they have come to mourn over—whose body they were to anoint with their sweet spices—has risen in His glory, and is "clothed with light as with a garment" (Ps. ciii. 2). "He is risen: He is not here."

You have, perhaps, been early this Easter morning,



with the holy women, to welcome our Lord. You went to the holy altar to receive that same glorified Body which He raised this day from the tomb, and you carried with you, as they did, loving hearts, full of the fragrant odours of affection and repentance, with many tears for the past, and good resolutions for the future—with mourning over the Passion of Jesus, mingled with rejoicing over His triumph. If we welcome Jesus in this spirit, He will not fail to fill our hearts with the brightness of His glorified Presence, and make the Easter Sunday the day of all days. “This is the day the Lord hath made; let us be glad and rejoice therein.” (Ps. cxvii. 24).

This is the day of our Lord’s triumph; He is victorious over all His enemies. That Body which was but now laid in the grave, wounded and bruised, pale and lifeless, bearing upon it the sad traces of all the outrages to which it had been exposed, is now glorified. He is “transfigured” before us; “His face shines as the sun, and His garments are white like snow.” Every trace of weakness and suffering has for ever disappeared, and His wounds, the tokens of defeat and pain, have become the pledges of victory, and the most conspicuous marks of glory.

Our Lord has changed the pain of the cross for everlasting and unspeakable glory and blessedness; He has changed the ignominy which surrounded Him for songs of praise. “Vah! thou that destroyed the temple, and in three days buildest it up again; save thyself, coming down from the cross.” “He saved others, Himself He cannot save! Let Christ the King of Israel come down now from the cross, that we may see and believe.” Our Lord has changed all these cruel and bitter reproaches for the song of the angels. “The Lamb that was slain is worthy to receive power and divinity, and wisdom and strength, and honour and glory and benediction.”

On the cross our Lord appeared to men to be defeated. What could be more complete than the triumph of His enemies? “Let us cut Him off from the land of the living, and let His name be remembered no more” (Jer. xi. 19). But that very defeat has been changed

into victory—or, rather, was in itself victory—and He has risen as a conqueror, to put all His enemies to shame, and to subdue all things under His feet. Our Lord rose victorious over all the power and machinations of men. The Jews had condemned Him to death out of envy—to exalt themselves, and to carry out the ideas of national grandeur which they had imagined to themselves; but the rising of our Lord from the tomb was their confusion, and the beginning of their downfall as a nation. But the victory was not only over men. Jesus had to fight, as we have, not merely “against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers, against the rulers of the world of this darkness, against the spirits of wickedness in the high places” (Ep. vi. 12), and men were but the visible instruments of these spirits of wickedness.

By His death and Resurrection our Lord overcame the dominion of the evil one, broke his bonds, and set His captives free. He was victorious over death, “that, through death, He might destroy him who had the empire of death—that is to say, the devil, and might deliver them who, through fear of death, were all their lifetime subject to servitude.” (Heb. ii. 14).

“Christ rising from the dead, dieth now no more; death shall no more have dominion over Him” (Rom. vi. 9). “Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting?” (1 Cor. xv. 54).

But our Lord did not triumph on this day for Himself. It was a small thing for the Son of God to be victorious over every creature, or over all creatures together. He triumphed for us, to show us how we, in our own time and way, might conquer also. “In the world you shall have distress; but have confidence, I have overcome the world.” (St. John xvi. 33). It sometimes appears as if the world and the powers of darkness were too strong for us, and that we must be overcome, or almost that we are already overcome; but did not our Lord triumph at the very moment when to men He seemed to be defeated? So it has been a thousand times with His Church upon

earth. Men have, again and again, supposed that she was destroyed and her enemies triumphant; but the victory came, as our Lord's triumph on this day, just when all hope seemed to be over. What more gracious and beautiful sign of ultimate success and complete victory could Jesus have left to His children who are struggling upon earth, than His glorious rising upon Easter Day?

"This is the day which the Lord hath made; let us be glad and rejoice therein." Throughout the whole of this octave the Church keeps on repeating these words, as if no others could express her feelings of joy and triumph.

"This month shall be to you the beginning of months; it shall be the first in the months of the year" (Ex. xii. 2), for "Christ our Pasch is sacrificed." Of all Christian solemnities, Easter holds the first place; it is the most joyful and the most triumphant of all days, and the one fullest of encouraging thoughts.

Our Lord chose that His Resurrection should, in a special manner, be the groundwork of our faith. St. Paul says: "If Christ be not risen again, then is our preaching vain, and your faith also is vain . . . and if Christ be not risen again, your faith is vain, for you are yet in your sins. Then they also, that are fallen asleep in Christ, are perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable; but now Christ is risen from the dead, the first fruits of them that sleep" (1 Cor. xv. 14). In this the apostle is but following the example of our Lord, who Himself made His Resurrection the proof and sign of His Divinity. He says: "An evil and adulterous generation seeketh a sign; and a sign shall not be given it but the sign of Jonas the Prophet. For as Jonas was in the whale's belly three days and three nights; so shall the Son of Man be in the heart of the earth three days and three nights" (St. Matt. xii. 39). Our Lord made the same prophecy, in another shape, when He said, "Destroy this Temple, and in three days I will raise it up. The Jews then said, Six-and-forty years was this Temple in building, and wilt thou raise it up in three days? But He spoke of the temple of His body" (St. John ii. 19).

The apostles, therefore, went out to preach, and they rested their teaching on this one great fact—which they made the foundation of faith—that Jesus had risen from the dead, and that they were the witnesses of it; and when they assembled together to choose St. Mathias to be one of the College of Apostles, in place of Judas, it was expressly because “one of these must be made witness with us of His Resurrection” (Acts i. 22).

As we ought constantly to glory in our faith, and to thank God, without ceasing, for having revealed it to us, we ought with all our hearts to glorify God, and triumph on the day on which this great sign and foundation of faith was granted to man.

But faith does not go alone: the beauty and joy of faith is in the hope which accompanies it; and our Resurrection is quite as much the miracle of hope as it is of faith. It puts before us in a most distinct, almost tangible, way, the one great need of man—that is, hope beyond the grave, a glorious immortality. Without this, all that the world can give is nothing, and is quite insufficient to satisfy our yearnings. Without this we are “of all men the most miserable.” It is the one thing in which no human power, or grandeur, or knowledge can help even in the least degree, and yet it is the one thing we need. Nothing that ever was thought of by man can cast a single gleam of light upon the darkness of the grave; but if the day is to come when “this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality” (1 Cor. xv. 53), we may well be patient of trials and sufferings, and of the grave itself.

Jesus has made His own Resurrection the example and pattern we are always to have before our eyes, on which we are to fix our thoughts in all trials and emergencies, by which we may learn to walk in His footsteps, to take up the cross and follow Him; since “if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall live also together with Christ” (Rom. vi. 8). The Resurrection, then, is the feast of our faith, our hope and confidence, and well may we say with the whole Catholic Church, “this is the day which the Lord hath made.”



But in rising again our Lord did not forget sinners; He died for sinners, and He rose again for sinners. The glory He assumed on this day was not so much to put His enemies to shame, as to give hope and comfort to penitent sinners; and we cannot fail to see how very tender He is in His triumph to sinners, even to those who have been unfaithful to Him in the course of His Passion. He seems to single out penitents and to bestow on them special marks of His favour. He did so because those who had been traitors to Him in time of need might well fear His indignation in the day of victory, and, it may be, because He knew how very few of us there would be who could lay any claim to His mercy, except as being penitent sinners.

The tradition of the Church is that His first visit after His Resurrection was made to His own most Blessed Mother. She had stood at the foot of His cross, and suffered with Him more bitterly than all others, and we cannot doubt that He visited her on that Easter morning, to turn her sadness into joy. His work was done, and He came to her to renew, in a certain sense, the joy of the holy house of Nazareth, and with it the secrecy with which the details of His hidden life are shrouded; and therefore it is that no mention is made of her by the Evangelists.

Next to His Blessed Mother He chose to distinguish St. Mary Magdalen. She had wept bitterly at the foot of the cross, and, therefore, she was to have her share in the glory of the Resurrection. Our Lord did not regard her sins, but that great love by which she had washed them away; and, therefore, He favoured her beyond all others in that special manifestation which He made of Himself. "And Mary stood at the sepulchre without, weeping . . . and when she had thus said she turned and saw Jesus standing: and she knew not that it was Jesus. Jesus saith to her, Woman, why weepeth thou? Whom seekest thou? She, thinking it was the gardener, saith to Him, Sir, if thou hast taken Him hence, tell me where thou hast laid Him, and I will take Him away. Jesus saith to her, Mary. She, turning, saith to Him,

Rabboni (which is to say, Master). Jesus saith to her, Do not touch me, for I am not yet ascended to my Father : but go to my brethren, and say to them, I ascend to my Father and to your Father, to my God and your God " (St. John xx. 11).

In this history we cannot but be struck with the gentle care which Jesus had for the penitent sinner Magdalen. He led her into the garden, that she might weep over His tomb, and then, when her heart was full of repentance and love, He appeared to her, and blessed her with the first sight of that glorious body which He had raised from the grave, and sent her as His messenger to carry the glad tidings to His disciples. The same forgiving gentleness is to be observed in His treatment of His apostles. They had abandoned Him in the time of trial. After all their great promises, not one had been found to stand firm, but "leaving Him they fled." Might they not expect that, when He returns to them a victor after His terrible conflict, He might have some stern rebuke for them? But no; He appears to them, and, in return for their denial and abandonment, He brings the message of peace. "Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be to you. And when He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side. The disciples, therefore, were glad when they saw the Lord" (St. John xx. 19).

This, then, my dear brethren, was the way in which our Lord avenged Himself on those who had deserted Him; He brought them His message of peace, and showed them the wounds by which He had purchased peace for them, and then once more took them to His heart. What He once did for His apostles, He now does for all Christians. He calls us all to the sepulchre, that we may understand our own unworthiness, and see how often we have been traitors and deserters, and to be led to grieve over our sins. Then, when He has touched our hearts, He brings us the message of peace which He gave to His apostles. "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you : not as the world giveth do I give unto you" (St. John xiv. 27).

At Easter, more than at all other times, our Lord calls

upon sinners to come to Him, and to turn away from their evil ways. The whole of Lent has been a preparation for this holy time, and everywhere has the message of Christ gone forth to call men to repentance. "Rise, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ will enlighten thee" (Eph. v. 14). Who can resist this call?—who can remain hard-hearted and obstinate, in spite of all the loving efforts of Jesus to arouse him?—who can be content to remain dead in sin, now that Christ has arisen gloriously from the grave?

Our Lord calls upon us all to arise from our sins to a new life. He addresses Himself first to those who are buried in the deep and deadly sleep of mortal sin, and He calls upon them, as He once called upon Lazarus, to arise and come forth. If they will only come to Him, He will forget all their past evils, and restore them to a new life. No matter how bad they may have been, no matter how evil the lives they have led, He will receive them kindly and lovingly, as He did St. Mary Magdalen on this Easter day. Pardon is now offered to every one—to the weak and cowardly, to the negligent, and even to those who have sinned by deliberate treachery.

But mortal sin is not the only sleep, and it is not only great sinners whom our Lord calls upon to arouse themselves. The atmosphere of this world has an effect upon all men, and its business, its cares, and its pleasures make us all drowsy for spiritual things. We are told in the parable of the ten virgins that, both wise and foolish, "they all slumbered and slept," so on this glorious Easter day our Lord calls upon us all to arise—the sinner to lay aside his wickedness, and come to the fountain of life; the tepid and slothful to arouse themselves to a more serious care for their own salvation, and even the most perfect one to "put on the Lord Jesus," and to press on to perfection with greater zeal and earnestness.

Our Lord rose from the tomb glorious and perfect. It was in our true human nature, body and soul, that He rose from the dead; but He had left behind Him all the frailties and miseries of our mortal state. He had laid aside all bodily weakness and pain, and had left in the

grave all the swathing bands that had been wrapped around Him, and He rose without any taint of mortality. This He would have to be the type of our rising; He calls upon us to cast off sin, and all its bondage, and all the affections which hold us captive, that we may rise with Him to a new life.

But we cannot rise with Him to victory, unless we are willing to take some share in the conflict. When our Lord brought peace to His apostles, He showed them His hands and His side, that, from these glorious wounds, they might learn the true path of peace. In the same way, when He rises from the dead and calls upon us to follow Him, He points to these tokens of the battle, and reminds us that we, too, must fight and conquer, if we would arrive at His peace and His glory. Men think to obtain peace by yielding, and so making a truce with the enemy; but our spiritual enemies are such that no truce can be made with them, and there is no alternative between victory and slavery. If we do not bravely cast off the yoke of the enemy, and conquer him with our Lord, there can be no true peace for us.

Oh, my dear brethren, how happy it would be for us all if we could learn our Lord's Easter lesson, and set ourselves seriously to conquer our interior enemies, and strive to break the bands that hold us, so that we might truly rise with Christ! Our Lord has first conquered for us and broken our fetters, so that it is only our own fault if we are any longer held fast by them. "Thou hast broken my bonds, I will sacrifice to Thee the sacrifice of praise, and I will call upon the name of the Lord" (Ps. cxv. 16).

But, "Christ rising again from the dead, dieth now no more; death shall no more have dominion over Him, for in that He died to sin, He died once; but in that He liveth, He liveth unto God: so do you also reckon that you are dead to sin, but alive unto God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. vi. 9). In the Resurrection our Lord, in a special manner, gives us the example of perseverance. He quits the tomb, and it is for ever, that "death may no more have dominion over Him." At this Easter time



there are a great many who have been aroused by the grace of God from spiritual death, and restored to life by His sacraments; but, alas! there are a great many who very soon and very easily fall back again into sin, and are but little the better for the great grace they have received.

“He that shall persevere to the end, he shall be saved” (St. Matt. xxiv. 13). This is what our Lord Himself teaches us, and He has made the mystery of His Resurrection the sign and the lesson of perseverance. “He is risen, He is not here; behold the place where they laid Him.” Our Lord rose, and instantly the stone was rolled away, and the grave-clothes cast off, and Jesus went forth for the great work of His forty days on earth. “Why seek ye the living with the dead?” (St. Luke xxiv. 5).

He sets the example to sinners, that they are at once to rise to a new life—to doing something. When God’s grace has been given to them, they are at once to begin the works of the life of grace; they are not to remain idle, lingering about the places, and companies, and occasions they have quitted. “Therefore, if you be risen with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God. Mind the things that are above, and not the things that are upon the earth” (Col. iii. 1). The new life we have received needs to be supported by the thought of heavenly things. “Where thy treasure is, there is thy heart also;” and we must raise our thoughts and affections to heavenly things, “where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God,” if we would remove our hearts from the dangers which beset them upon earth.

“And they knew Him in the breaking of bread.” There is one other great subject connected with this Easter festival with which I may very well conclude—it is the great duty of Easter Communion. There is no duty of a Christian life more sacred and solemn than that of receiving the Blessed Sacrament at Easter. It is the special way in which we are to acknowledge the Paschal sacrifice offered for us. “Christ our Pasch is sacrificed, therefore let us feast not with the old leaven

of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth" (1 Cor. v. 7). By receiving the Blessed Sacrament, we put ourselves in union with the Passion and Resurrection of our Lord. "For as often as you shall eat this bread and drink the chalice, you shall show the death of the Lord until He come" (1 Cor xi. 26).

At this time we are bound specially to make this solemn commemoration, because it is the very anniversary of the institution of the Holy Sacrament. That the Blessed Eucharist might be for ever intimately associated with His Most Blessed Passion, Jesus chose for its institution the moment of His last supper, when that Passion was about to begin, that, when His apostles called to mind the solemn words, "Do this in remembrance of me," their thoughts should at once be carried back to all the touching and painful scenes of that night.

Paschal Communion, however, is not required merely by custom and by feeling; it is a duty laid upon us in the strongest manner by the Catholic Church. It is called "Communion," because receiving the Blessed Sacrament is the special outward sign which her children are bound to give of being members of the Church. "We, being many, are one bread, one body, all who partake of one bread" (1 Cor. x. 17). If any one, without sufficient excuse, fails to receive Communion at the time, he is guilty of a mortal sin, and, in a sense, cuts himself off from the Communion of the Catholic Church. There is a certain time fixed for the performance of this duty, and every Christian is bound to use all his efforts to receive the Blessed Sacrament at the time specified.

The obligation, moreover, is one which keeps on until it is satisfied. This is necessary to remember, because there are some duties which have no further claim on us when the time is past. If a person, for instance, neglects to hear Mass on Sunday, he commits a great sin, if it is by his own fault, but the obligation is at an end, and he is not bound to hear Mass next day to make up for his omission; but with the precept of Easter Communion it is different. The law binds you to receive the Blessed

Sacrament at the prescribed time, but if you neglect it during that time, you are bound to receive the next day, and the next day to that, and so on ; and if you will not obey this command, you are living in a perpetual breach of one of God's greatest commandments, and in open disobedience to His Church.

But, my dear brethren, is it not terrible to think that we need thus to be urged to the fulfilment of so sacred a duty? We are like the poor and the blind who are invited to the royal banquet, who must be driven by force to partake of the feast He has provided. "Go ye into the highways and hedges and compel them to come in."

In the Holy Eucharist, let us learn to "know Him in the breaking of bread" with the disciples at Emmaus,—and this history will suitably conclude our thoughts on Easter Communion.

"And behold, two of them went the same day to a town which is sixty furlongs from Jerusalem, named Emmaus. And they talked together of all the things which had happened. And it came to pass that, while they talked and reasoned with themselves, Jesus Himself also drawing near, went with them. And He said to them, What are these discourses which you hold with one another, as you walk and are sad? . . . Then He said to them, O foolish and slow of heart to believe in all things which the prophets have spoken! Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and so enter into His glory? . . . And it came to pass, whilst He was at table with them, that He took bread, and blessed and brake, and gave to them. And their eyes were opened, and they knew Him; and He vanished out of their sight. And they said one to another, Was not our heart burning within us whilst He spoke in the way, and opened to us the Scriptures? And rising up the same hour, they went back to Jerusalem . . . and told what things were done in the way, and how they knew Him in the breaking of bread" (St. Luke xxiv. 13).

# Catholic Sermons

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## SERMON LVII.

### *Jesus our Guest.*

“This day I must abide in thy house” (St. Luke xix. 5).

IN the Holy Communion, my dear brethren, our Lord comes to us as a Guest. He said to us, as He said to Zacheus, “I must abide in thy house,” and He bids us prepare a place for Him within our hearts. Listen to the history of our Lord’s visit to Zacheus. “And entering, He walked through Jericho. And behold there was a man named Zacheus, who was the chief of the Publicans, and he was rich. And he sought to see Jesus, who He was, and he could not for the crowd, because he was low of stature. And running before, he climbed up into a sycamore tree, that he might see Him: for He was to pass that way. And when He was come to the place, looking up, He saw him, and said to him, Zacheus, make haste and come down, for this day I must abide in thy house. And he made haste and came down, and received Him with joy. And when all saw it, they murmured, saying that He was gone to be a Guest with a man that was a sinner. But Zacheus, standing, said to the Lord, Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and, if I have wronged any man of anything, I restore him fourfold. Jesus said to him, This day is salvation come to this house, because he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost” (St. Luke xix. 1).

We could not have a more beautiful illustration of the kind and loving intention of our Lord in visiting us in the Blessed Sacrament, and of the way in which we ought to prepare ourselves to receive Him.

It is a great work to prepare a house for the Lord of glory—a work which requires all the care and diligence



that men can bring to it. King David desired to build a material house for God; let us take him as our example. He was full of the thought of it. "He swore to the Lord, he vowed a vow to the God of Jacob. If I shall enter into the tabernacle of my house: if I shall go up into the bed wherein I lie: if I shall give sleep to my eyes, or slumber to my eye-lids, or rest to my temples, until I find out a place for the Lord, a tabernacle for the God of Jacob" (Ps. lxxxi. 3); and he said to Nathan the prophet, "Dost thou see that I dwell in a house of cedar, and the ark of God is lodged within skins" (2 Kings vii. 2). When he was forbidden to begin the work of building the Lord's house, he considered it an honour merely to get together the building materials for the use of his son, who was chosen to do the work he had himself longed to undertake. "The work is great, for a house is prepared, not for man, but for God, and I, with all my ability, have prepared the expenses for the house of my God. Gold for vessels of gold, and silver for vessels of silver . . . onyx stones, and stones like alabaster, and of divers colours, and all manner of precious stones, and marble of Paros in great abundance" (1 Par. xxix. 1).

When King Solomon, his son, undertook the work, he said: "The house which I desire to build is great, for our God is great above all gods. Who, then, can be able to build Him a worthy house? If heaven, and the heaven of heavens, cannot contain Him, who am I that I should be able to build Him a house? But to this end only that incense may be burnt before Him" (2 Par. ii. 4). "And the house, when it was building, was built of stones hewed and made ready: so that there was neither hammer, nor axe, nor any tool of iron heard in the house when it was in building." "And the house, before the oracle, was overlaid with most pure gold, and fastened on the plates with nails of gold. And there was nothing in the temple that was not covered with gold" (3 Kings vi. 7—21).

This material temple was not the house of God in the highest sense, but "to this end only, that incense may be burnt before Him;" and yet these holy men thought

that no care, no riches that man could give, were too great for its preparation. What, then, ought to be the care which Christians should devote to the task of preparing themselves to become the temple of God, when the Lord of glory proposes to visit them with His real and true presence?

In the exhortation to the Corinthians, which I before quoted, St. Paul says: "But let a man prove himself, and so eat of that bread, and drink of the chalice," and he concludes with the words: "But if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged." Our duty, then, when we would approach to the holy table, is first to "prove ourselves"—that is, to look more closely and carefully into our own lives and conduct than we are in the habit of doing. It is not as if we could ever, in reality, be worthy of the honour bestowed on us. When we have done our best, we are still "unprofitable servants," and may well say, "Lord, I am not worthy that Thou shouldst enter under my roof, but only say the word, and my soul shall be healed." Still, we are bound to make such preparation as human weakness will allow us to make:

"Friend, how camest thou in hither, not having on the wedding garment?" We may well fear to have these words addressed to us if we do not "prove ourselves," and prepare our souls, as we ought, when we are to receive the Holy Sacrament. Let us dwell, for a few moments, on the parable of the marriage feast, which seems to have our Lord's table specially in view. "The kingdom of heaven is likened to a king, who made a marriage for his son." We can fancy to ourselves the grandeur of this banquet, with its regal state, and costly dishes, with the splendid court that surrounded it, and everything that power and wealth could supply on so great an occasion. But "they that were invited were not worthy," and the king sent his servants into the highways to bring in "the poor and the feeble, the blind and the lame," to "compel them to come in, that his house might be filled."

But when "the king went in to see the guests, he saw

there a man who had not on a wedding garment. And he saith to him, Friend, how camest thou in hither, not having on a wedding garment? But he was silent. Then the king said to the waiters, Bind his hands and feet, and cast him into the exterior darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (St. Matt. xxii. 2).

We can imagine the confusion and dismay of the culprit, who "had not on the wedding garment;" he "was silent"—he had no excuse to make, and the affront offered to his entertainer and sovereign was manifest before all who sat at table with him. Such is the case with those who presume to partake of our Lord's heavenly banquet without having on the "wedding garment" of divine grace. They can have no excuse to give, for God has supplied them with this heavenly garment, shining with the Precious Blood of Christ, and it is through their own malice and negligence that they are not clothed in it.

The essential requisite for receiving the Holy Communion is to be free from mortal sin. Anyone who knowingly and willingly receives in mortal sin, is guilty of a terrible sacrilege, and offers the greatest insult and outrage to our Lord that can well be imagined. This is obvious; the very essence of mortal sin is to be a rebellion against God, and its effect is completely to take away the life of supernatural grace which has been given to the soul, and to leave it stained with guilt, odious and abominable in the sight of God. That a man knowing himself to be in such a state—knowing that he has turned against Christ and betrayed Him—that he is impure and defiled in the eyes of God, should, nevertheless, dare to receive within himself the "Lamb without spot"—this is, indeed, an outrage which can be compared to nothing but the treacherous kiss of Judas in the garden of Gethsemane.

What a horrible traitor is he who goes to the altar of God, and enters into the "Holy of Holies," taking his place amongst the servants of God, in the sight of the holy angels, with reverence on his lips and treason in his



heart, striking his breast in outward adoration, and, at the same moment, mortally offending and insulting the Lord whom he professes to adore! "Friend, wherefore art thou come?" "Dost thou betray the Son of Man with a kiss?" Why comest thou to "eat and drink judgment to thyself?" These are the words which our Lord seems to address to the unworthy communicant.

If a man discovers that he is in mortal sin, he is bound to have recourse to the Sacrament of Penance before he can presume to approach to the holy table. It is not enough for him to repent of his sin. It is true, indeed, that perfect contrition—that is, a true sorrow for sin, arising from the love of God—will obtain pardon even before receiving the Sacrament, since Divine charity is not consistent with mortal sin; but this is not a sufficient preparation for Communion. Out of reverence for the Holy Sacrament, the stain of sin must be washed away in the special laver of sanctification provided by our Lord, and no one, except in case of extreme necessity, may venture to receive Holy Communion without making use of it. In the Old Law God commanded a great laver—a "molten sea," as it was called—to be made, in which those entering into the holy place might wash and be cleansed from their impurities. The Sacrament of Penance is the great laver provided for us, in which we must wash before we presume to enter the Christian Holy of Holies—the Communion of the Body and Blood of Christ.

But here let us ask, Why do we make this great distinction between mortal and venial sin? Is it enough to be free from mortal sin when we approach to the Holy Communion? No, my dear brethren; it is not enough. We ought to make every exertion to purify ourselves from even the smallest stain when we would receive our Lord.

"He that is just, let him be justified still; and he that is holy, let him be sanctified still" (Apoc. xxii. 11); and even the most perfect of the saints may well strive for higher sanctity before entering into that great presence.

Every unrepented sin disfigures the soul, and diminishes



the grace which our Lord gives us in the Holy Eucharist ; but mortal sin alone makes him absolutely unfit to receive the Blessed Sacrament. So long as a man wilfully remains in mortal sin, he is incapable of receiving sanctifying grace, and the Sacraments are for him only a mockery ; whereas all the Sacraments are themselves a means for washing away lesser sins from those already in a state of grace.

The very idea of mortal sin is that it is a sin committed wilfully and with complete deliberation, so that, ordinarily speaking, people cannot fail to remember the grievous sins that they have committed ; whereas venial sin is very often the result of weakness : it comes from surprise, or want of thought, or is in some way a less complete action than mortal sin, and one of which we are often not fully conscious.

With the utmost care, men cannot altogether avoid venial sin. If we were commanded to abstain from Holy Communion till we could venture to say that we were free from every sin, we should never venture to receive. Our Lord meant the Holy Eucharist for imperfect and sinful men, and not for the perfect only. He meant it to support supernatural life, and to heal spiritual infirmities ; so He does not require of us, as a preparation, a greater degree of sanctity than sinful men can easily obtain.

The prophet says : " Be ye clean, you that carry the vessels of the Lord " (Is. lii. 11) ; and it is clear that the first preparation for receiving our Blessed Lord must be the most perfect purification of our souls that we are able to effect ; for " what fellowship hath light with darkness ? and what concord hath Christ with Belial ? " (2 Cor. vi. 14). Purity of soul, however, includes several things, of which it will be well to speak in detail. The first thing, evidently, is purity of conscience. We must strive earnestly to wash away the stain of every sin actually committed, by repenting not only of great sins, but of everything, however small, by which you may have offended God. There are many faults which are trifling in themselves, which, nevertheless, sully the soul's purity,

and are like the dust which imperceptibly settles upon every object, and spoils its beauty, if allowed to remain. Such faults as these, again, may be compared to a cloud which comes between God and our souls; they hinder the rays of God's light from falling in their brightness upon our souls, and prevent us from seeing Him as clearly as we should. "Blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God." The more carefully, therefore, we cleanse our consciences, the more clearly shall we see God.

In addition to purity of conscience, we should aim at purity of will—that is, we should desire to conform our wills to the will of God. To be perfect, we must will what He wills, and aim at the perfection He requires of us; and we should at least desire to sacrifice everything which is contrary to Divine will. There are many people who try to purify their consciences, by repenting of the sins by which they have actually stained their consciences; but they do not go deep enough, and do not try to make themselves men, "according to God's own heart," by conforming themselves in all things to God's will. On the contrary, they allow all sorts of perverse wills to remain unchecked within them, and, in little things, they set up their own inclinations as idols in opposition to the will of God.

It is the same thing with the affections. "Where this treasure is, there is thy heart also" (St. Matt. vi. 21). You cannot really give your heart to God, unless you make some effort to take off your affections from all things which are displeasing to Him. Even after repenting of our sins, our affections and longings cling to the creatures which have led us astray—to the vanities and pleasures and allurements of every kind which the tempter presents to us. "Know you not that the friendship of this world is the enemy of God? Whosoever, therefore, will be a friend of this world, becometh an enemy of God" (St. James iv. 4). When we are to receive from our Lord the greatest of all acts of friendship, we should, at least, try to break off from all His enemies. It is not enough to repent of the sins which are the fruit, but we must endeavour to correct the perverse wills and inclinations and

desires which are the roots from which sinful actions spring. And who can give you this great purity? Who can take away the stains from the conscience, and thus regulate the affections and the will? No one but our Lord Himself can do this. See Jesus at His last supper, as He washes His apostles' feet! "He cometh, therefore, to Simon Peter, and Peter saith to Him, Lord, dost thou wash my feet? Jesus answered, and said to Him, What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter. Peter saith to Him, Thou shalt never wash my feet. Jesus answered Him, If I wash thee not, thou shalt have no part in me. Simon Peter saith to Him, Lord, not only my feet, but also my hands and my head" (St. John xiii. 6).

When we are to receive the Holy Communion, our Lord seems to say to us, as He said to St. Peter, "If I wash thee not, thou shalt have no part in me." It is His grace alone which can wash our souls, and restore to them once again the white garment we received in Baptism. It is His grace which must ornament our souls, so as to make them fitting tabernacles in which He may abide. The special means by which this purifying grace is bestowed is the Sacrament of Penance. The Prophet Zacharias says: "In that day there shall be a fountain open to the house of David, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for the washing of the sinner" (Zach. xiii. 1); and, in the Church of God, this fountain is the Sacrament of Penance.

There are many other ways in which venial sin, and sometimes mortal sin also, may be forgiven, and therefore we are urged to multiply our acts of contrition and aspirations of love before Holy Communion; but the great means of purification appointed by God is the Sacrament of Penance, and to this those who are conscious of mortal sin are always bound to have recourse.

I must, however, consider, a little more exactly, what is the obligation of going to Confession before Communion. It is not quite enough to say that all who are in mortal sin are bound to confess their sins before receiving the Holy Eucharist; because, as we all know, it is the general



rule amongst Catholics to use Confession as a preparation for Communion. If we were contented with ourselves, and supposed that we needed no special purification when we were to receive our Lord, it would show that we had a very exalted opinion of the habitual holiness of our lives, or else a very unworthy idea of the greatness of the Guest who was to visit us. Even the holiest and most perfect of men needs to be washed again and again before he can venture to receive the All Holy Lord of heaven and earth; and it is a small thing to expect that Christians should make a preparation for His coming by the humble confession of their sins, and by receiving the purifying grace of the Sacrament of Penance. Under any ordinary circumstances, therefore, for any one to receive Holy Communion without previous Confession, would be an act of great presumption, quite opposed to the custom of the Catholic Church.

To this, however, there is a limitation in practice. It would never do to allow too ceremonious a preparation to prevent the faithful from receiving our Lord frequently in the Holy Communion, and, therefore, Confession is not necessary every time you receive, when your Communion is frequent. For example, priests and religious, and devout people who communicate every day, or several times in the week, are not obliged to go to Confession before each Communion; but it is enough if they receive the sacrament of Penance with reasonable frequency. If anyone has the misfortune to fall into grievous sin, he must always go to Confession before he ventures to communicate, but, otherwise, Confession is not necessary before each Communion, under these circumstances. At the same time, if we look into the lives of the saints, I think we shall find that their anxiety was to confess their sins as often as possible; sometimes, even every day, because they felt that no pains and diligence could be too great to purify themselves for the coming of so great a Guest.

But purification is not enough. When an honoured Guest comes to visit you, you are not contented with cleanliness: you want to put before him everything pre-



cious that your means will allow. When a sovereign visits the dwellings of his subjects, and passes through their streets, how great is the anxiety to prepare the way by which he is to pass—everything offensive or unsightly must be removed, and everything beautiful and precious is brought out to welcome him. You see triumphant arches raised in every street, and words of welcome inscribed on almost every house. This is the way in which men greet their kings and queens, and we may learn from them when we are preparing a place for the Lord of Glory. If they seek for material decorations, ought not we, much more, to look out for those spiritual ornaments which may make us acceptable in the sight of our Lord and King!

“And I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, like a bride adorned for her husband” (Apoc. 21). And St. John describes the glory and beauty of that holy city, with its jasper walls and its foundations adorned with precious stones. Would that we could imitate the splendour of this New Jerusalem when the Spouse of our souls comes to visit us. The gold and precious stones which He asks of us are not the perishable things that men covet, but acts of virtue and piety done in His honour—they are loving affections and generous resolves, and, above all, the resolute will to serve Him.

“If any man love me, he will keep my word, and the Father will love him, and we will come to him, and make our abode with him” (St. John xiv. 23). Our Lord Himself tells us how we are to make our hearts a fit dwelling-place for Him.

Three dispositions, however, there are, which we need in a special way. “Whence is it to me that the Mother of my Lord should come to me” (St. Luke i. 43). These were the words with which St. Elizabeth saluted our Blessed Lady at the Visitation. Should not we, then, be overwhelmed with the honour which our Lord pays us by His visit? “Whence is it to me that the Lord of glory, the King of heaven and earth, should come to visit me? No matter what we may be in body or soul; no

matter what we have done for God, or how exalted we may be in the estimation of men ; it is still a marvellous and most undeserved honour. "He that made me, rested in my tabernacle" (Eccles. xxiv. 12).

Besides receiving our Lord with humility, we must be generous with Him. See what Zacheus did when our Lord became his Guest. "He made haste and came down, and received Him with joy. . . And Zacheus, standing, said to the Lord, Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor, and, if I have wronged any man of anything, I restore him fourfold. Jesus said to him, This day is salvation come to this house, because he also is a son of Abraham" (St. Luke xix. 6). This is an example of the generosity with which we should treat our Divine Guest ; and, if we were to display our generosity as Zacheus did, we, too, should hear the words : "This day is salvation come to this house."

Again, what do most men offer Him besides words ? We are all conscious of many things we might offer if we had a little good will ; sometimes these things are pet follies which we might give up ; sometimes they are little exertions which we ought to make, but have not the courage to attempt ; sometimes a little more generosity in money matters is wanted of us, as it was with Zacheus ; sometimes God needs a little more of our time and thought. Have you not, my dear brethren, some rich sacrifice to make to God, which you might offer to our Lord when He comes to visit you ? At least, you have the sacrifice of your heart, which He will not refuse.

Our Lord Himself gives us a picture of the grudging hospitality too frequently offered in His words to Simon the Pharisee about St. Mary Magdalen : "Dost thou see this woman ? I entered thy house ; thou gavest me no water for my feet ; but she, with tears, hath washed my feet, and with her hair hath wiped them. Thou gavest me no kiss ; but she, since she came in, hath not ceased to kiss my feet. My head with oil thou didst not anoint, but she with ointment hath anointed my feet. Wherefore I say to thee, Many sins are forgiven her because she hath loved much" (St. Luke vii. 44).

I will conclude with some beautiful words from St. John Chrysostom on the dispositions for receiving the Holy Communion : "To this table of the Lord let none dare to draw near with squeamishness or carelessness. Let all be fiery, all hot, all roused. To the Jews it was commanded touching the Paschal Lamb, 'and thus shall ye eat it, with your loins girded, your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hand, and ye shall eat it in haste ; it is the Lord's passover.' But thou needest to be more watchful than they. They were about to travel from Egypt to Palestine, and, therefore, they bore the guise of travellers ; but the journey that lieth before thee is the journey from earth to heaven. And, therefore, it behoveth thee in all things to be on thy guard, for the punishment of him that eateth and drinketh unworthily is no light one.

"Bethink thee how thou art indignant against him which betrayed, and them that crucified the Lord ; and look to it well that thou also be not ' guilty of the Body and Blood of the Lord.' As for them, they slew His most Holy Body ; but thou, after all He hath done for thee, dost thrust Him into thy polluted soul. For His love it was not enough to be made man, to be buffeted, and to be crucified ; He hath also mingled Himself with us, by making us His Body, and that, not by faith only, but verily and indeed.

"Can anything be purer than that man ought to be who eateth of this great Sacrifice ? Can sunbeam be clearer than that hand ought to be which breaketh this Flesh ?—that mouth which is filled with that spiritual fire ?—that tongue which is reddened by that Blood ? Awful, exceedingly ! That, whereon the angels quail to look, neither dare to gaze steadfastly upon It, because of the blinding glory which shineth therefrom : upon This we feed, with This we become one, and are made one body of Christ, and one Flesh" (*Breviary Lesson—Marquis of Bute's Translation*).

# Catholic Sermons

BY REV. J. B. BAGSHAWE.

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## SERMON LVIII.

### *The Holy Eucharist in Scripture.*

“Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet have believed” (St. John xx. 29).

IN preparing for the Holy Communion, my dear brethren, it is very important to have a familiar knowledge of the words of Holy Scripture bearing upon this great mystery. If we are, before all things, to “discern the Body of the Lord,” we can do nothing better than ponder on the very words of that good Lord Himself, as they are recorded for us. No explanations or exhortations of men can be like the words of God, as dictated by the Holy Spirit.

It is not as if we wanted proof of the doctrine which the Catholic Church teaches us; she is her own proof, and in this, and in all other things, the faith rests on her teaching and authority. “Going, therefore, teach ye all nations,” “Go ye into the whole world, and preach the Gospel to every creature . . . and they going forth, preached everywhere: the Lord working withal, and confirming the word with signs that followed” (St. Mark xvi. 15). They went forth into the world strong in the commission granted to them, without needing any books to confirm their teaching. The inspired words which we now read had not yet been written; but the apostles taught, and their doctrine rested only on the authority they had received from our Lord Jesus Christ. In the same way, the teaching of the Catholic Church, at this day, as in all ages, rests solely on the teaching authority which it inherits from the apostles. Still, the words of the Holy Scripture—the very accents of our Lord Himself—are our consolation and encouragement, and we cannot meditate upon them too frequently.



I will first speak of those passages which directly tell us of the Holy Eucharist, and we may have an opportunity at another time to consider some of the types and figures by which the Holy Sacrament was anticipated in the Old Testament. The words of our Lord are familiar to us all, as we have heard them from our childhood; but there are, perhaps, a good many who do not exactly know in what order they are to be taken, and in what part of the Holy Scripture they are to be found.

There are three occasions on which the Blessed Sacrament is especially referred to. These are the Promise, the accomplishment of the Promise, and the working out of the Promise in the practice of the Church. The mutual dependence of these passages immensely adds to the weight which the words would have in themselves; they explain one another in such a manner as to take away the possibility of misunderstanding.

The Promise is related to us in the sixth chapter of St. John's Gospel, and it comes in a very remarkable place. The Evangelist tells us of the miracle in which Jesus fed the five thousand, who had followed Him into the desert, with five barley loaves and two fishes, and then speaks almost immediately of the promise which Jesus gave of the Holy Eucharist, in which He was to multiply Himself to be the food of all men.

"I am the bread of life. Your fathers did eat manna in the desert, and are dead. This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that if any man eat of it he may not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If any man eat of this bread he shall live for ever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh, for the life of the world. The Jews, therefore, strove among themselves, saying, How can this man give us His flesh to eat? Then Jesus said to them, Amen, amen, I say unto you, except you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink His blood, you shall not have life in you. He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood hath everlasting life; and I will raise him up in the last day. For my flesh is meat, indeed, and my blood is drink, indeed; he that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood abideth in

me and I in him. As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father, so he that eateth me, the same also shall live by me. This is the bread that came down from heaven. Not as your fathers did eat manna and are dead : he that eateth this bread shall live for ever. These things He said, teaching in the synagogue in Capharnaum. Many, therefore, of His disciples hearing it, said, This saying is hard, and who can hear it ? . . . After this many of His disciples went back, and walked no more with Him. Then Jesus said to the twelve, Will you also go away ? And Simon Peter answered Him, Lord, to whom shall we go ? Thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and have known that Thou art the Christ the Son of God " (St. John vi. 48).

Here we have a most distinct promise made to us by our Lord, and made solemnly and publicly before the people—He would give us His Flesh and Blood for our food. He repeats this promise, and insists upon it, in different forms, again and again. "My flesh is meat, indeed; and my blood is drink, indeed. He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood, abideth in me and I in him." His words were, moreover, understood by everybody to be plain and literal; friends and enemies alike understood Him to make a great and marvellous promise, though neither of them could understand how he could possibly fulfil it.

His enemies asked, "How can this man give us His flesh to eat?" and even some of His disciples murmured, and said, "This is a hard saying; who can hear it?" and "after this many of His disciples went back, and walked no more with Him," and our Lord let them go. His faithful friends could not understand how His promise was to be fulfilled any more than the others; but they trusted Him, and waited. "Will you also go away?" "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life." The time had not come for our Lord to explain to men the way in which His gracious promise was to be fulfilled, and it was their duty to believe His word, even though it seemed hard, and they could not understand it.

St. Augustine on this says : " Many, therefore, not of His enemies, but of His disciples, hearing this, said, This is a hard saying, and who can hear it ? If His disciples found this saying hard, how did His enemies take it ? And, nevertheless, He must so speak as not to be understood by all. God's secret ought to make us intent, and not hostile ; but these men quickly fell away when our Lord Jesus Christ spoke in this manner."

A promise like that given by our Lord makes us look out anxiously for a corresponding performance, and we naturally expect that the fulfilment will be something which, in solemnity and importance, comes up to the expectations raised by the words of the promise. If we find the promise and the performance correspond, they strengthen each other, and show us conclusively that we have not been misunderstanding our Lord's words. Let us, then, see how Jesus fulfilled His promise. It was the most solemn moment in His mortal life. It was the hour when the shadow of His cross was upon Him, and He had called His apostles around Him expressly to speak His last words, and to leave them His last legacy.

" With desire I have desired to eat this pasch with you before I suffer : " it was this last Paschal supper that He chose as the fitting occasion for carrying out the promise He had made to His disciples.

It is remarkable that we do not read of the fulfilment in the Gospel which contains the promise, but we find it related by the three other Evangelists. St. Matthew tells us what our Lord did in these words : " And whilst they were at supper Jesus took bread and blessed and broke, and gave to His disciples and said, Take ye, and eat : this is my body. And, taking the chalice, He gave thanks, and gave to them, saying, Drink ye all of this : for this is my blood of the New Testament, which shall be shed for many unto remission of sins " (St. Matt. xxvi. 26). St. Mark gives us the history in very similar words : " And whilst they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessing, broke and gave to them, and said, Take ye, this is my body. And, having taken the chalice, giving thanks, He gave it to them, and they all drank of it, and He said

to them, This is my blood of the New Testament, which shall be shed for many " (St. Mark xiv. 22).

St. Luke says : " And taking bread, He gave thanks, and broke, and gave to them, saying, This is my body, which is given for you : do this for a commemoration of me. In like manner, the chalice also, after He had supped, saying, This is the chalice, the New Testament in my blood, which shall be shed for you " (St. Luke xxii. 19).

Here we have an accurate account of the fulfilment of our Lord's promise. In His wisdom and His power, He found out a way in which, exactly and precisely, to carry out what He had promised, by making Himself our food, and, at the same time, to avoid those apparently insuperable difficulties which presented themselves to the imagination, by hiding His most Precious Body and Blood under the appearances of bread and wine.

But we want to hear a little more of the Divine Sacrament then instituted. It was not a mere passing form of words, but a great fact, a mighty and persistent Presence which has come into the world, and which has to take a tangible shape amongst men. It is a doctrine which has to be taught throughout the world, and must carry with it the most distinct and unmistakable consequences. Let us look on, then, for twenty or thirty years, and see the place which this doctrine has taken amongst men. The apostles have gone forth on their mission, thousands of the heathen have been brought into the fold of Christ, and churches are being established on all sides.

St. Paul tells us, in the passage we have already had occasion to quote, how our Lord's words have been understood and reduced to practice during the years that have passed since they were spoken. " For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, that the Lord Jesus, the same night in which He was betrayed, took bread, and, giving thanks, broke, and said, Take ye and eat ; this is my Body which shall be delivered for you ; this do for the commemoration of me. In like manner also the chalice, after he had supped, saying, This chalice is the New Testament in my Blood ; this do ye, as often as you shall drink, for the commemo-



ration of me. For as often as you shall eat this bread and drink the chalice, you shall show the death of the Lord until He comes. Therefore, whosoever shall eat this bread, or drink the chalice of the Lord unworthily, shall be guilty of the Body and of the Blood of the Lord. But let a man prove himself, and so eat of that bread, and drink of the chalice; for he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh judgment to himself, not discerning the Body of the Lord. Therefore there are many infirm and weak among you, and many sleep; but, if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged" (1 Cor. xi. 23).

What gives these words their particular cogency is that they are not speculative, but practical; they were called for by the necessities of daily life. The Christians had, from the beginning, been taught to meet together to celebrate the "Lord's Supper," and it was necessary, by very plain and practical teaching, to provide against the abuses which are sure to creep into all things that are a matter of routine. St. Paul, therefore, emphatically repeats, in our Lord's own words, the doctrine which they had received, and solemnly draws the conclusion which must necessarily follow from that doctrine: "Let a man prove himself, and so eat of that bread; for he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh judgment to himself, not discerning the body of the Lord."

In the same Epistle, St. Paul makes another reference to the Holy Eucharist. He says: "The chalice of benediction which we bless, is it not the communion of the Blood of Christ? And the bread which we break, is it not the partaking of the Body of the Lord? For we, being many, are one bread, one body, all that partake of one bread. Behold Israel, according to the flesh: are not they who eat of the sacrifices partakers of the altar? What, then? Do I say that what is offered in sacrifice is anything? or that the idol is anything? But the things which the heathens sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils and not to God. And I would not that you should be made partakers with devils; you cannot drink of the chalice of the Lord and the chalice of devils: you can-

not be partakers of the table of the Lord and of the table of devils" (1 Cor. x. 16).

In these words the apostle alludes to the practice of receiving the Holy Eucharist, and to the faith of Christians concerning it, and uses it as an argument to persuade them to keep clear of the heathenish rites around them—those who are "partakers of the Body of Christ must not be partakers with devils." Nothing can illustrate the faith of the early Christians better than such an allusion as this. This passage brings before us, moreover, the Blessed Sacrament as our great bond of union. It is called the Holy Communion, because it unites all the members of the Church into one body, inasmuch as they are all supported by one heavenly food. "We, being many, are one bread, one body, all that partake of one bread."

This is the way in which St. Paul understood and taught our Lord's doctrine, after an interval of thirty years, when the Church was first established. But let us go on for another period and see how the pastors of the Church speak after four hundred years, when the stress of persecution has been removed, and peace has been restored. St. Ambrose was the Archbishop of Milan towards the end of the fourth century, and was one of the great lights of the Church; let us hear what he says: "It is a marvellous thing that God rained down manna for the fathers, and that they were fed with daily food from heaven. Whence it is said, *men eat the bread of angels*. And yet all who eat that bread died in the desert. But this food which thou receivest—this Living Bread that cometh down from heaven—supplies us with the substance of eternal life; and whosoever shall eat this Living Bread shall never die; and it is the Body of Christ. Consider, now, whether the bread of angels be more excellent, or Christ's flesh, which is in truth the body of life. That manna came down from heaven, this is above heaven; that was of heaven, this is of the Lord of heaven; that was liable to corruption if preserved to another day, this is free from all corruption, and whosoever religiously tastes it, cannot feel corrup-

tion." "For this sacrament which thou receivest is effected by the word of Christ. Now, if the word of Elias so availed as to draw down fire from heaven, shall not the word of Christ be of avail to change the natures of the elements? Concerning the works of the whole world, you have read that, *He spoke, and they were made; He commanded, and they were created*. The word, therefore, of Christ, which could, out of nothing, make that which was not, cannot it change those things which are into that which they were not?" "The Lord Jesus Himself cries out, *This is my Body*. Before the benediction of heavenly words another species is named; after the consecration, His body is signified. Himself declares it His own blood. Before the consecration it is called another thing; after consecration it is called blood. And thou sayest, Amen—that is, it is true. What the mouth speaks, let the inward mind confess; what language expresses, let thought feel."

I will give you one other extract. St. John Chrysostom was Patriarch of Constantinople about the same time that St. Ambrose was a bishop in the Western Church, and he is alluding to the history of the poor woman having an issue of blood. She came behind our Lord and touched the hem of His garment, "for she said within herself, If I shall only touch His garment, I shall be healed. But Jesus, turning and seeing her, said, Be of good heart, daughter, thy faith hath made thee whole. And the woman was made whole from that hour" (St. Matt. ix. 21). St. Chrysostom applies this to the Holy Eucharist, and says: "Let us also touch the hem of His garment; yea, rather, if we will, we have Him entire. For, indeed, even His Body is set before us now; not His garment only, but even His Body; not so that we may touch it only, but so even that we may eat and be filled. Therefore, let us approach with faith, each one that has an infirmity. For, if they who touched the hem of His garment drew from Him so much virtue, how much more they who possess Him entire? But to approach with faith is not merely to receive what lies to open view, but also to touch with a clean heart, to be so disposed as coming



to Christ Himself. For what if thou hear no voice? But thou seest Him before thee; yea, rather, thou also hearest His voice, whilst He is speaking through the evangelists. Believe ye, therefore, that even now it is that supper whereat Himself reclined. For, in nothing does that differ from this. For, neither did man make this and Himself that, but Himself makes both this and that. When, therefore, thou beholdest the priest distributing to thee, do not account that it is the priest that does this, but that it is the hand of Christ that is stretched out. He that hath given thee the greater thing—that is, hath set Himself before thee—much more will He not disdain also to distribute to thee that body. Let us, then, both priests and subjects, hear what has been vouchsafed to us; let us hear and tremble. He has given us to be filled with His holy flesh; He has set Himself before us sacrificed. Wherefore, what excuse will there be for us, when feeding on such things, if we sin in such ways?" (*Faith of Catholics*, vol. II., pp. 294, 297, 298, 313).

We see, then, my dear brethren, how faithfully these great doctors of the Church, like St. Paul, hand on, and enforce the doctrine of our Lord about the Holy Eucharist. "I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered to you." After four hundred years the teaching of "that night in which He was betrayed," so far from growing faint and dim, is only plainer and more fully expressed. One age after another takes up the song of thanksgiving, and East and West join in contributing their acknowledgments for the great gift bestowed upon men at that last supper. And so the Church, throughout her whole history down to our own times, has gone on continually praising our Lord for the great Sacrament of His love, and devising new ways of showing reverence and devotion towards it.

I will conclude these extracts from the writers of the early Church with a few practical words about the thanksgiving which we ought to make after Communion. This is a subject which requires a good deal of consideration. There are many people who hardly know how to make a proper thanksgiving after their Communions.



They have not thought very much about what our Lord expects of them, or what it is becoming in them to offer; and, therefore, they give way to their natural restlessness, and hurry out of church at the first moment that they can do so. Have you not often, my dear brethren, seen people, and well-meaning people, too, who have received the Holy Communion at Mass, struggling in the crowd at the church door a few minutes after? As soon as the two or three short prayers which conclude the Mass are finished, they hurry out into the street, and begin talking to their friends, and set about the ordinary business of life. They have, perhaps, taken reasonable pains to prepare for Communion, and really intend to make a good Communion, but they have so little notion of what is due to our Lord, that they have literally nothing to say to Him, and, if we may say so, carry Him unceremoniously into the street as a neglected and despised guest.

Communicants who act in this manner have no right to expect much grace and blessing from the Lord who has visited them. "What shall I say to you? Do I praise you? In this I praise you not." These were the words which St. Paul addressed to those of the Corinthians who met in a disorderly way to celebrate the Holy Eucharist, and I am afraid he would use the same words of those who are in so great a hurry after Communion. It will sometimes, of course, happen that people are obliged to go home at once; then they can, without any disrespect, make their thanksgiving as they go on their way, and our Lord will be with them as He was with the disciples going to Emmaus; but there are very few who could not afford ten minutes or a quarter of an hour after the Mass is finished, if they wished to do so.

Now, let us consider the disrespect shown. If you were admitted to an audience of your sovereign, and then, the moment you were in the presence chamber, almost at the very moment of being presented, you were to turn aside, and forget all about the place in which you were standing; if, for example, you at once began to amuse yourself, to talk and laugh as you would anywhere else, without regard to your sovereign's presence, what would be thought

of your conduct? Would not everybody say that you were grievously deficient in manners, if not in loyalty, and that you were quite unfit for such company? And yet this is just the way in which men treat our Lord, and it will be very well for us all, my brethren, if our consciences will allow us to say that we have never done anything like it.

Can we think that our Lord deserves or requires less deference than an earthly monarch? Will He, before whom the angels and archangels bow in adoration, be contented with a careless and indifferent reception? No, my dear brethren; He bears with us, indeed, because of our weakness of body and mind, but every slight, and carelessness, and rudeness which we show to Him in the Sacrament of His love, is odious and painful to His Sacred Heart, and must, in some way or other, be atoned.

The first thing to do is to give proper time. It is in vain to think that you can make a suitable thanksgiving if you will not give time for composure and recollection. Why are you in such a hurry? You are not in a hurry when you are amusing yourselves; you think very little of an extra quarter of an hour if you are doing something that interests you. Men might suppose that we had something much more important to do, whereas these few minutes, well employed, may be our salvation.

“It is the part of man to prepare the soul” (Prov. xvi. 1). What is this preparation of soul? We cannot bring down the fire from heaven; but we can prepare our hearts to receive it. We can give ourselves the time and composure of mind which are needed for the approach of God’s inspirations. This is particularly necessary after Communion. We must shut ourselves up, as it were, with our Lord Jesus, and let nothing whatever interrupt us for the time we think necessary and becoming. We must take care to get into a place where we shall not be distracted; to supply ourselves with books to help our devotions, and to give our time honestly, without one thought of what we are to do afterwards, so that we may not be longing to get our prayers done as soon as possible. If we prepare ourselves in this way,

then the time after Communion will be a time of devotion, and not of hurry and distraction.

Devotion after Communion consists of three things—Adoration, Thanksgiving, and Petition, about all of which there is a great deal to be said. The first thing clearly must be to adore. What should we do if we were suddenly brought into the visible presence of Jesus in His glory? What *could* we do, but fall down in humble adoration, as the apostles did at the Transfiguration, when “they fell upon their face, and were very much afraid”? So our first thought ought to be to humble ourselves in the dust. “I adore Thee devoutly, O hidden Deity . . . to Thee my whole subjects itself.” These are the feelings which we ought to pour out before Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. It would be well if we could excite within us a little of that enthusiastic adoration, of that fervour of loyalty with which, in heaven, angels cast their crowns at His feet, and saints on earth pour out their hearts before Him; but we are, most of us, too tame and too cold in our feelings.

“You ask and you receive not, because you ask amiss” (St. James iv. 3). We all mean to ask for something when we have our solemn interview with our Lord after Communion, but how many “ask amiss”? Our Lord says to us, as He said to the blind men, “What will ye that I do to you?” How little that is straightforward and earnest have we to say in reply! We may fancy our Lord using to us the words of Pilate during the Passion, “Speakest thou not to me. Knowest thou not that I have power to condemn thee, and I have power to release thee?” (St. John xxix. 10).

His word is everlasting life; He holds the “keys of death and hell.” All the graces which we can hope for are in His hands. Oh, then, let us use every moment of the time given to us in the Holy Communion to implore from Him the graces we so urgently need!

# Catholic Sermons

BY REV. J. B. BAGSHAWE.

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## SERMON LIX.

### *Preparation for Holy Communion.*

"Thy ear hath heard the preparation of their heart" (Ps. ix. 17).

I MUST now speak a little more in detail about the preparation for Holy Communion. I have dwelt already on the most important part of this preparation—that is, on the purity of conscience, and the dispositions of soul which are necessary. There is, however, a good deal to be said about the immediate preparation which people should make when they are to receive the Blessed Sacrament.

In the first place, my dear brethren, we will consider the bodily preparation which the Church enjoins. The Catechism says: "In order to receive the Blessed Sacrament worthily, we must be in a state of grace; and we must also be fasting from midnight." The Church commands us to receive Communion *fasting*—that is, without having taken any food whatever since twelve o'clock the night before we receive. This rule may seem a strange one, at first sight, since our Lord instituted the Holy Sacrament, and gave to His apostles their first Communion, after His Last Supper. Our Lord did this manifestly in order to make the institution of the Holy Eucharist correspond with the time appointed for the Jews to eat the Paschal lamb—of which it was the fulfilment.

The Church's hymn to the Blessed Sacrament says: "Observata lege plene, cibus in legalibus, cibum turbæ duodenæ, se dat suis manibus."

"He, the Paschal victim, eating,  
First fulfils the law's command,  
Then as food to all His brethren  
Gives Himself with His own hand."

The Old Law and the New had to meet at this mysterious feast: "This is the New Testament in my blood;"



and therefore it was that our Lord instituted the Holy Sacrament after His apostles had partaken of the Paschal lamb, and the supper was concluded.

The usage of receiving at this time was soon changed, and for obvious reasons. The necessity had begun to make itself felt, even when St. Paul wrote to the Corinthians: "When you come, therefore, together into one place, it is not now to eat the Lord's Supper. For each one taketh before his own supper to eat. And one, indeed, is hungry, and another is drunk. What, have you not houses to eat and drink in? Or despise ye the Church of God, and put them to shame that have not? What shall I say to you? Do I praise you? In this I praise you not" (1 Cor. xi. 20).

From these words we learn that, even amongst the fervent converts of the apostles, it was impossible to associate the Holy Communion with ordinary eating and drinking, without danger of great abuse, and the Church, in consequence, soon introduced the practice of fasting before receiving the Blessed Sacrament. As a general rule, men are better able to give their attention to spiritual things early in the day, and, moreover, a feeling of reverence naturally suggests that we should let the Bread of Heaven, which our Lord gives, be the first food of which we partake each day.

The law which ordains this fast is a very strict one, and one which binds under pain of mortal sin: it may well be so, since it is a law made to secure the reverence due to the Body of our Lord, and the regulations which concern His honour must necessarily be matter of importance. It has to be remembered that there are two kinds of fasting—the natural, and the ecclesiastical fast. The natural fast means abstaining entirely from any kind or description of food or drink; whereas the ecclesiastical fast is merely going without certain kinds of food, at certain times, according to the regulations laid down by the Church. The fast for Communion is the natural fast, from the first moment of the day on which we receive—that is, from the moment the clock strikes twelve at night, till after Communion.

You may not touch anything whatever by way of food or drink, however small in quantity, or, if you do so, you are bound to put off your Communion till another day. It is said, "by way of food," to guard against scrupulosity. In the ordinary processes of life, as we breathe, and go from place to place, we may easily swallow something or other without the slightest idea of taking food—and scrupulous people sometimes fancy that such accidental things can keep them from Communion; but this is not the case: there is no necessity for any unusual care, it is only necessary that nothing should be taken *as food*. To give an example of this distinction, the rubric of the Missal distinctly says that if a drop of water be unintentionally swallowed in washing the mouth, it does *not* prevent Communion—the reason of this is, that it is not then taken *as food*.

The law is, as I have said, very strict, so that any one who knowingly received the Blessed Sacrament after breaking his fast, would be guilty of a mortal sin, and, of course, make a sacrilegious Communion. No amount of personal inconvenience would authorize any one to disregard the law; so, for example, if a priest were, by forgetfulness, to break the fast, he must abstain from saying Mass, even if his doing so disappointed all his congregation, and prevented them from hearing Mass on a Sunday.

There are a few exceptions to this rule, and the principal one is when the Blessed Sacrament is received as Viaticum. Every Christian, who is in danger of death, is bound, if possible, to fortify himself for his end by receiving Holy Communion, and in that case the law of fasting does not bind. The Holy Sacrament is then called Viaticum, because it is received as the preparation for the last journey which man can take. "Viaticum" means the provision of food which men used to carry with them for their sustenance on a journey, and the name is most beautifully given to the Body of our Lord, when it is received to prepare us for the passage from this life to eternity. In danger of death, it is obviously, as a general rule, impossible for men to remain fasting for

any considerable time, and therefore the law about fasting is not made to apply to those who are in that state.

There are a few other exceptions on which it is unnecessary to dwell, as they chiefly apply to priests. For instance, if a priest were taken ill in the course of Mass, another priest must, if possible, complete the Sacrifice which has been begun, even if he be not fasting.

With regard to fasting before Communion, as, indeed, about other fasts, you sometimes hear people say, How can eating and drinking be a matter of religion? Am I worse in the sight of God because I have had my breakfast, that I should be excluded from Communion? In making this objection, they fail to see the point in question. It is not the food, but the disobedience, that makes them unworthy in the sight of God. In themselves, food or drink do not make people displeasing to God, and it is simply the law of the Church which prevents them from communicating; but, when this law is made and fully known, then comes in the crime of disobedience, and, my dear brethren, we cannot have too often before our eyes the words of Holy Scripture: "It is like the sin of witchcraft to rebel, and like the crime of idolatry to refuse to obey" (1 Kings xv. 23).

The conditions for receiving Holy Communion give us a good example of the difference between the laws of God and those of the Church. It is a sacrilege to receive in mortal sin, and unlawful to receive after you had broken your fast; but the two things are quite different. The one is from the law of God, and no man could change it. No dispensation could possibly allow any one to receive Communion in mortal sin; he is absolutely unfit till he has repented of his sin. But the condition of fasting is one which the Church has made, and which it could, at any time, take away; so that, for instance, if a sufficient reason appeared, the Pope would grant a dispensation to any one to receive the Blessed Sacrament after taking food.

The care of the Holy Sacrament of our Lord's Body has been left by God to the Church, not to individuals. We cannot conceive that so great and venerable a Sacrament could possibly have been left to the discretion of

each Christian, without an authority appointed to settle the details of its administration and custody. Our Lord, indeed, sketches out, as it were, in a few words, the doctrine of His Real Presence; but there remain a thousand questions of faith and discipline to be settled before this doctrine could be brought into practical use, and nothing but a living authority is competent to arrange such details, and to make the necessary regulations for the care and reverence due to the Holy Sacrament.

It will be well to go over once more in detail what a good Christian should do by way of preparation for Communion. The first thing is the confession of your sins. It is the common practice of the faithful to go to Confession, if possible, the night before Communion; or, at any rate, not to leave too long an interval between Confession and Communion. In this confession we should have a strong desire to prepare a resting-place for our Lord within our hearts as pure and spotless as we can. "Cleanse, O Lord, my heart and my lips, as Thou didst those of Isaias the prophet." Ought not this to be our prayer when we are to receive our Lord?

Listen to the prophet's words: "I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and elevated: and His train filled the temple. Upon it stood the seraphim . . . and they cried one to another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, the Lord God of Hosts, all the earth is full of His glory. And the lintels of the doors were moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke. And I said, Woe is me, because I have held my peace, because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people that hath unclean lips, and I have seen with my eyes the King, the Lord of Hosts. And one of the seraphim flew to me, and in his hand was a live coal, which he had taken with the tongs off the altar. And he touched my mouth and said, Behold this hath touched thy lips, and thy iniquities shall be taken away, and thy sin shall be cleansed" (Isaias vi. 1).

We live in the midst of a people "of unclean lips," and how shall we venture near to the Holy of Holies—not to see the King, the Lord of Hosts, but actually to



receive Him into our breasts? When we have been clothed again by the Lord with the garment of Divine grace, "washed and made white in the Blood of the Lamb," our care must be to keep it spotless. The great work of a Christian, at all times, as St. James tells us, is "to keep oneself unspotted from this world" (St. James i. 27); and before receiving Holy Communion we ought to be more than ordinarily anxious to do so.

There are many things which are right in themselves, which may, nevertheless, take off the freshness and brightness of that bridal attire in which we should wish to appear before our Lord in the Holy Communion. These it is well to avoid, as far as possible. The reverence due to our Lord seems almost to require that we should keep away from all those pursuits and amusements, which involve great dissipation of mind, for at least some hours before we receive the Holy Sacrament.

The Psalmist says: "If I have remembered Thee on my bed, I will meditate upon Thee in the morning" (Ps. lxii. 7). If, then, my brethren, you wish to be devout and recollected at Holy Communion in the morning, you must take the thought of our Lord with you as you lie down to rest. In the morning, you must keep your thoughts for Him, as far as possible, free from earthly cares. Our Lord was laid in a "new sepulchre" in which "no man had been laid," and the holy women went there to anoint His body early in the morning. As we rise each day, our minds are, in a certain sense, new and fresh; and it will be well if we can offer them to our Lord before any of the ordinary thoughts of this life have taken possession.

"Hearken, O daughter, and see, and incline thine ear; and forget thy people, and thy father's house, and the King shall greatly desire thy beauty: for He is the Lord thy God, and Him they shall adore" (Ps. xlv. 11). You may fancy that these words are addressed to your soul, as you are preparing for Communion: "Forget thy people, and thy father's house"—forget all the ordinary affairs of life; lay aside, for a few moments, every temporal interest and concern, that you may enter into communion

with our Lord, "for He is the Lord thy God, and Him they shall adore."

But what is to be the special and immediate preparation? Take care, in the first place, to be at Mass in good time—that is, some ten minutes or a quarter of an hour before the Mass actually begins. Is there anything, my dear brethren, which robs so many people of the graces which God meant to give them on Sundays, as the habit of being late for Mass? People come in after the Mass has begun—at the Gospel, even later sometimes: they enter the church in a great hurry; they have no time to collect their thoughts, and the Mass is often half over before they have begun to consider how they are to hear it. It is not to be wondered at if they go away much as they came, having done very little to please God, or bring down His blessing. They have, *perhaps*, satisfied their obligation, but that is all. This way of hearing Mass certainly is no preparation for receiving Holy Communion.

You must secure yourself plenty of time, then, if it is possible; and, in general, with ordinary pains and forethought, you can get quite as much time as is necessary. And, now, what are the special thoughts which are suitable to the Mass at which you are to communicate? The first part of the Mass is preparation; the priest humbles himself for himself and his people, standing at the foot of the altar, and confessing his sins. "I will go unto the altar of God, to God who giveth joy to my youth." Let it be your thought, then, that you are preparing to go up to that altar as one about to partake of the sacrifice offered on it. "I rejoiced at the things that were said to me: we shall go into the house of the Lord. Our feet were standing in thy courts, O Jerusalem" (Ps. cxxi. 1). As you kneel at the foot of that altar, are you not in the very courts of the tabernacle of the Lord? "Lord, who shall dwell in Thy tabernacle?—or who shall rest in Thy holy hill? He that walketh without blemish, and worketh justice" (Ps. xiv. 1). "Who shall ascend into the mountain of the Lord, or who shall stand in His holy place? The innocent of hands and clean of heart" (Ps. xxiii. 3). Humble yourself, then, with the priest at the

foot of the altar, and strive after that cleanness of heart, that you may "stand in His holy place."

But the priest proceeds with the oblation. He offers up the bread and wine to God, that they "may become the Body and Blood of His most beloved Son Jesus Christ." He says: "Accept, O holy Father, Almighty, eternal God, this unspotted host, which I, Thy unworthy servant, offer unto Thee, my living and true God, for my innumerable sins, offences, and negligences, and for all here present: as also for all faithful Christians, both living and dead, that it may be profitable for my own and their salvation, unto eternal life. Amen."

And, now, what will you offer of your own, on the day of your Communion, to unite with this great Sacrifice, which is being offered to God in your name? Is it not the time to make the most generous offering of yourself and all you have to our Lord? But now comes the bell for the Sanctus, as the priest, at the conclusion of the Preface, recites the words: "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Sabaoth, the heavens and earth are full of Thy glory: Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord: Hosanna in the highest."

These words usher in the Canon of the Mass—that solemn part in which is the Sacrifice. May we not feel as if the veil of the Temple was drawn back, and we were invited to come near, with the angels, to the great throne of God? They surround our altar and wait with us to do homage to their Lord as He comes on earth. The bell rings again to tell us that the Consecration is at hand, and every head is bowed in readiness. "Come not nigh hither, and put off the shoes from thy feet: for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground." These were the words which the Lord spoke to Moses when He "appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; and he saw that the bush was on fire and was not burned" (Exod. iv. 2). The Lord does not now command you not to come to Him; on the contrary, He calls upon you to approach, and you are about to be admitted to the most intimate union which a creature can have with his Creator; but, none the less must you remember the

awful sanctity which surrounds Him. "Loose the shoes from thy feet"—bow down thy head in adoration, for in one moment the Lord thy God will have appeared on His altar; not as "a burning fire" to drive you away, but hidden in His sacramental presence, that you may be encouraged to approach.

And the bell sounds again, and you know that our Lord has come down upon the altar, under the guise of bread, and is lifted up in the priest's hands that you may adore Him. Can you fail to think of the words of Jesus: "If I shall be lifted up, I will draw all things to myself"? Once did our Lord fulfil this prophecy upon the cross; but He daily fulfils it in the Holy Sacrifice of the Altar. Let us pray that our hearts may be drawn to Him, especially when we are about to receive Him in His Holy Sacrament.

Our Lord comes once again on the altar, and again calls for your special and most loving adoration. That He may be on the altar as "the Lamb standing, as it were, slain," He completes the Sacrifice by being present under the two species of bread and wine. He is present wholly and entirely under each form, but the separate consecration is the very essence of this mysterious Sacrifice.

From the Consecration to the Communion our Lord remains lying upon the altar as our Sacrifice. He is there to be offered again to the Eternal Father for us, and to be charged, if we may say so, with all our commissions and wants, since our petitions must be through Him, and "we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of Him" (Eph. iii. 12). The Church solemnly presents her Sacrifice to God with these words: "We most humbly beseech Thee, Almighty God, command these things to be carried by the hands of Thy holy angel to Thy altar on high, in the sight of Thy Divine Majesty; that as many of us as by participation at this altar shall receive the Most Sacred Body and Blood of Thy Son, may be filled with all heavenly benediction and grace."

During the Canon of the Mass the Priest solemnly prays for the whole Catholic Church on earth, and especially for "all here present, whose faith and devotion



are known unto Thee, for whom we offer, or who offer up to Thee, this Sacrifice of praise for themselves, their families and friends, for the redemption of their souls, for the hope of their safety and salvation, and who pay their vows to Thee, the eternal, living and true God."

Prayer is also made for all the faithful departed, and especially for our own friends, that God will grant to them "a place of refreshment, light and peace;" and, finally, for ourselves, for "us sinners, Thy servants," who are "hoping in the multitude of Thy mercies." When you receive the Blessed Sacrament, you make the highest act of Communion—that is, by uniting yourself with our Lord, who is the head, you also unite yourself with all His members.

In Him you are united with the whole Catholic Church—with the saints reigning with Him in heaven, with the holy souls of the faithful, and with the whole Church militant throughout the earth. You may well, then, join very earnestly in these solemn prayers which are offered during the Canon for all the different parts of the Church, however far away, since "we being many are one head, one body, all who partake of one bread."

And now comes the part where the priest prepares himself for the Communion, which is the completion of the Sacrifice of the Mass. He is to receive our Lord under the two forms of bread and of wine, because he has not only to partake of the Sacrifice, but must complete it by the Communion which mystically represents our Lord's death upon the cross. To prepare himself, he adopts the tone and language of a child in his father's house. In the *Pater Noster* he addresses the Eternal Father with love and confidence; in our Lord's own words: "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, give us this day our daily bread." Ask earnestly for this bread of your soul—"the bread of heaven, having in it everything that is delicious." Try now, at least, to hunger and thirst after the food that perishes not, and ask of your Heavenly Father grace so to receive it, that "of a temporal gift it may become to you an eternal remedy."

As the priest makes his preparation you must make yours, and when the bell for the "*Domine non sum dig-*

nus" announces that the priest is about to communicate, you go up to the altar rails, that you may partake of the same Sacrifice. You kneel at the altar rails, and hold before you the Communion-cloth, that the Sacred Host may not by any accident fall on the ground. As you do so, should you not think to yourself that our Lord has taken upon Himself this humble form, and exposed Himself to a thousand affronts, simply to carry out His design of uniting Himself with men? It is all very well for us to take precautions, and do the best we can to secure Him against insult; but how very little is all that we can possibly do! As you take that Communion-cloth, beg of our Lord to preserve His Precious Body and Blood from all irreverence, by His own power, since His creatures can, at the best, do so little.

The Confiteor is recited: "I confess to Almighty God, to Blessed Mary ever a Virgin," and to all the Court of heaven. You acknowledge before angels and men—before those whom Jesus said should "sit upon twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel"—that you are a sinner, and unworthy of the great gift to be bestowed upon you. You have done, it is true, all that you can to prepare yourself for that great Presence, but still you cannot but acknowledge yourself to be a sinner, and that you have sinned exceedingly in thought, word and deed." You may well, then, renew your sorrow for all the offences and negligences and unworthiness of your former life, whilst the priest pronounces the prayers, "*Misereatur tui*," and "*Indulgentiam, absolutionem, etc.*" You must not, however, then think over past sins in particular, as that could only lead to scrupulosity. When once you have gone up to receive Communion, no matter what faults there may have been in your preparation, you must go on, and receive as well as you can. Even if you should fancy that you have made your Confession insufficiently, or broken your fast, you would not be bound to retire from the Communion rails, as that might easily give scandal to others: the best course would be to make an act of contrition in you own mind, and receive the Holy Communion as fervently as possible.

The priest now turns to you, holding in his hands the

Blessed Sacrament, with these words: "Behold the Lamb of God, behold Him who taketh away the sins of the world." How great would be our fervour if, with St. John, we could see the heavens opened, and the Holy Spirit "as a dove descending and remaining on Him," and could hear the voice from heaven: "Thou art my beloved Son, in Thee I am well pleased."

Three times over does the priest repeat the words: "Lord, I am not worthy that Thou shouldst enter under my roof, but say only the word, and my soul shall be healed." You have made the best preparation that you could, but at the end you must acknowledge yourself infinitely unworthy of the great grace offered to you. The greatest of the saints, could not deem himself worthy of a visit from the Lord of glory; and you must earnestly and sincerely confess your own unworthiness. Our weakness and sinfulness, indeed, are the very best ground for confidence, since it was for sinners that He died, and for sinners that He left the Communion of His Body and Blood.

And to each in turn does the priest bring the Body of the Lord, with the words: "The Body of our Lord Jesus Christ preserve your soul to life everlasting," and with this solemn sentence you receive your Lord. "To life everlasting," that "He may raise you up at the last day." Oh, Christian soul, bow down humbly before your Lord in profound adoration; think that you have Him who will one day come to be your Judge. You can never be nearer to Him until that day comes when you have gone forth from the body, and see Him face to face; but He has not come now to judge, but to save you. "He came unto His own;" you belong to Him body and soul; He made you and redeemed you, and gave you everything you have, and now it is for you to make some return of thankfulness for all His many blessings. He comes with His hands full of graces, with pearls and jewels and precious things that this world cannot give, and it is your own fault if He does not bestow them upon you in abundance.

# Catholic Sermons

BY REV. J. B. BAGSHAWE.

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## SERMON LX.

### *The Eucharistic Sacrifice.*

"Bring sacrifices, and come into His courts; adore ye the Lord in His holy court" (Ps. xciv. 9).

THE end of all creatures is to give glory to the Lord who made them. Willingly or unwillingly, in some way or another, every creature must do this. The unreasoning things in nature do this by the necessity of their being. "By Thy ordinance the day goes on; for all things serve Thee" (Ps. cxviii. 91). "Praise the Lord from the earth, ye dragons, and all ye deep. Fire and hail, snow and ice, and stormy winds, which fulfil His word" (cxlviii. 7). It is reserved, however, for His intelligent creatures to give glory to Him willingly and joyously, and to offer to Him their "reasonable service." "All nations whom Thou hast made shall come and worship before Thee, O Lord, and shall glorify Thy name, for Thou art great, and dost wondrous things. Thou art God alone" (Ps. lxxxv. 9).

To enable us to do this in the best possible manner, our Lord has instituted the Eucharistic Sacrifice, that men may have something higher and more perfect to present to their Creator than their own prayers and praises.

I must now, my dear brethren, speak of the Blessed Eucharist as a Sacrifice, although it may be necessary to repeat a good deal of what I have said on other occasions.

From the very beginning, man began the worship of Sacrifice, and when the human race was driven forth from the Garden of Eden, the children of Adam offered their Sacrifices to God. Cain and Abel offered the first fruits of their toil to be consumed in Sacrifice before the Lord; and when the dry land appeared once more after the deluge, the first idea of the Patriarch Noe was to build



an altar to God, and offer to Him of the living things that had been preserved from destruction. And so Sacrifice went on in all ages, till our Lord came amongst those who had preserved the knowledge of the true God; and even those who had forgotten Him, either by the remains of original tradition, or by an instinct of their nature, continued to offer Sacrifice to the false gods whom they worshipped in His place.

Men knew but little of the true meaning of the Sacrifices they offered, or what it was that gave them their value. They were, indeed, "showing forth the death of the Lord until He came" at His first coming, as we are to show forth His Passion and death until He comes again in His glory.

The Son of God was to be the "Lamb slain from the beginning of the world," and He was slain in the Sacrifices which were offered as figures of Him. Every Sacrifice which was acceptable to God, derived its value from the Sacrifice which our Lord was to offer, since every Sacrifice made His death present in a certain sense, and profitable to those who offered it.

But when Christ had come, and as the "High Priest of the good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle not made by hands—that is, not of this creation—neither by the blood of goats, nor of calves, but by His own blood, entered once into the holies, having obtained eternal redemption," (Heb. ix. 11), a more perfect way was given to men in which His Sacrifice should be continued and made present to the human race, and this was the Sacrifice of the Mass. It is called the Eucharistic Sacrifice—that is, the "Sacrifice of thanksgiving," because its first and greatest object is to pay to Almighty God that tribute of praise and thanksgiving which is due to Him from all His creatures.

In the Old Law Sacrifices were offered for many objects. We read of holocausts, or whole-burnt offerings—of peace offerings, of sin offerings, and of morning and evening Sacrifices. In place of all these different Sacrifices, we have the one Sacrifice, which is the fulfilment of them all. The Catechism tells us that "the Sacrifice of the Mass is

offered for four ends—first, to give supreme honour and glory to God ; secondly, to thank Him for all His benefits ; thirdly, to obtain pardon for our sins ; and, fourthly, to obtain all graces and blessings through Jesus Christ.”

And now let us ask more exactly what is Sacrifice ? A Sacrifice is offering or presenting to Almighty God, as a token of homage, some creature which is to be consumed or poured out, or in some way spent, or changed, in His service. This offering is made as an acknowledgment that He is the Giver of all things, from whom “every best gift and every perfect gift” comes down (St. James i. 17) ; and also that He is the Supreme Lord and Master of life and death. “I will kill and I will make to live ; I will strike and I will heal, and there is none that can deliver out of my hand” (Deut. xxxii. 39).

In the Law of Moses the living things sacrificed were slain, and the flesh, wholly or in part, burned, and the blood poured out and sprinkled around the altar ; the incense was burned and the oil consumed before the holy place, and the loaves of propitiation were placed every week fresh before the sanctuary. Everything offered in Sacrifice was in some way dedicated to God, and changed so as to be removed from the ordinary uses of life.

Let us see how this applies to the Sacrifice of the Mass. In the first place, the matter of the Sacrament is bread made of wheat, and wine of the grape. The usage and regulation of the Western Church, as I have before explained, is that the bread should be unleavened—that is, made without any yeast, and made in the shape of a wafer. This is, however, only a matter of regulation, as any kind of wheaten bread would be valid matter to be consecrated. In parts of the East, on the contrary, *leavened* bread is used, with the sanction of the Church, and every priest is bound to follow the usage of the rite in which he is ordained.

The *essence* of the Sacrifice of the Mass is generally considered to be in the consecration alone, although some consider that the Communion also is essential. By the consecration our Lord becomes present on the altar, in a new and changed form, as a Sacrifice. Our Lord lays

aside His glory, and assumes this lowly garb, in order to become our offering to God, and thereby to renew the Sacrifice of the Cross, in which He was actually slain, and His blood poured out.

The Catechism tells us that "the Holy Mass is one and the same Sacrifice with that of the cross, because Christ, who offered Himself a bleeding Victim to His Heavenly Father on the cross, continues to offer Himself in an unbloody manner on the altar, through the ministry of His priests." It is a repetition of the Sacrifice of Mount Calvary, and not a new Sacrifice; it is the same, because our Lord Himself is always both the real Priest and the Victim, and the difference is in the instruments by whom He acts and the manner of oblation—that is, that, although His Blood is really present, it is not visibly poured out.

There cannot be any Sacrifice of the Mass without a fresh consecration, since the consecration is the essence of the Sacrifice, so that the Church Office on Good Friday, which is called the Mass of the Presanctified, is not really a Mass, as there is no new consecration. And, again, there cannot be any consecration without an act of Sacrifice: if a priest consecrates validly, he must also, of necessity (according to the common opinion), offer Sacrifice, however informal the celebration may be.

For the completion of the Sacrifice—if not for its essence—it is necessary that the consecration should be under both species, under the forms of both bread and wine, as it is this double consecration which most vividly represents His mystical death. It is true that under each form, our Lord is whole and undivided, His Body and Blood, His Soul and His Divinity, since "Christ rising from the dead, dieth now no more;" but still, by the consecration in two forms, the separation of the Body and Blood is mystically accomplished.

The Communion, also, is necessary for the completion of the Sacrifice. The priest who has consecrated must also receive the Blessed Sacrament under both kinds to carry out the destruction, or consummation, of the Victim, which belongs to the idea of Sacrifice. For this reason



the Catholic Church makes every effort to secure the completion of the Sacrifice, and every regulation gives way to it. If, for instance, a priest were to die, or to be taken ill, after the Consecration, some other priest must, if possible, be found to continue the Mass and receive the Holy Communion, and he must do so whether fasting or not.

At the Mass the priest consecrates enough of the bread to suffice for his own Communion, and for such of the faithful as may wish to receive, and if any of the Sacred species remains over after the Communion of the laity, he consumes it himself, unless it is necessary to reserve the Blessed Sacrament and to place it in the tabernacle for Communion and Benediction. In that case, the priest consumes the Sacred Host, as occasion may require, at another Mass, when the Sacrifice has been completed.

The Holy Mass is the great work of devotion by which we are to sanctify the Sunday, and is also one of the principal means of Divine grace granted to us ; it is, therefore, very necessary for all Christians to understand how to assist at it in the most profitable manner. The Holy Mass is not merely a form of prayer, but a great action, and all those who are present have, in a certain sense, to take part in what is done. A Sacrifice is offered to God, and those who assist are not mere spectators, but actors. At the commemoration of the living, the priest prays Almighty God to “ be mindful of all here present whose faith and devotion are known to Thee, for whom we offer or who offer, up to Thee this Sacrifice of praise ;” and, again, he says : “ Brethren, pray that my Sacrifice and yours may be acceptable to God the Father Almighty.”

This may be illustrated by the history of Zachary, the father of St. John the Baptist. We are told that “ when he executed the priestly function in the order of his course before God, according to the custom of the priestly office, it was his lot to offer incense, going into the Temple of the Lord : and all the multitude of the people was praying without, at the hour of incense . . . and the people were waiting for Zachary : and they wondered that he tarried so long in the temple ” (St. Luke i. 8).



He was offering incense within the veil, hidden from their sight, and yet they were all taking part with him, and joining in his Sacrifice.

It is important to dwell upon this thought, because a good many people do not sufficiently realize that it is their Sacrifice which the priest is offering up, and that they have not merely to look on, but to join heartily in the great action which is done in their name. A great number of things, which might otherwise seem strange, are at once explained if we think of the Mass, as the joint Sacrifice offered to Almighty God, by priest and people together. At the Mass the priest turns his face away from the people, and says the greater part of the prayers in secret, and, moreover, the Mass is said in a language which the congregation do not understand: this would be unintelligible, if it were only a form of united prayer, but the meaning is plain when we remember that the object of all present is to join, not in his word, but in the great action which he is doing. Again, it is very easy to understand that people may assist at Mass, and yet make use of a number of different forms of prayer: the one thing necessary is to join in the Sacrifice, and that is best done if each one makes use of the kind of devotion which will best help him to unite his intentions with those of the priest.

When Zachary and all the priests of the Old Law entered into the Temple of the Lord, they were arrayed, by God's command, in their priestly vestments. This was not for the people, but because they were to offer Sacrifice, and their vestments were the sign of the office in which they were engaged. So it is at the Mass. The altar, with the crucifix and the candles burning beside it, the vestments the priest wears, and the ceremonies of the Mass, are not a display to the people, but the outward mark and fitting accompaniment of a Sacrifice offered to God. Again, a great number of Masses are celebrated. The priest celebrates Mass, whether a congregation of people is present or not. If the Mass were merely a form of public prayer, this would seem unnecessary and useless, but, as each Mass is a Sacrifice offered up not only

for those present, but “for all faithful Christians, living and dead,” it can be offered profitably even when no one is present.

In England and the Western part of the Church the Mass is always said in Latin, and, with a few exceptions, in very nearly the same form; but in the East a great number of rituals or liturgies are still in use. These come down from the earliest ages, and are used both in the communion of the Catholic Church, and amongst those who, in past ages, broke off from Catholic unity. It is most interesting to see how these different rituals arose, and to observe in what different forms they put before us the idea of the Holy Sacrifice. These forms express the faith of the Church in the most authentic and vivid way; they are not mere abstract professions of doctrine, but they are the faith put into practical and devotional language. Moreover, they are not like passages from the fathers, which are the language and expression of one man, but they are forms of prayer adopted and used by thousands. They are, perhaps, of all human things, the least liable to change, and so hand down to all ages what were the ideas and feelings of those who first used them.

It would appear that the liturgy—the prayers and forms used in celebrating Mass—were not written till about the middle of the fourth century. During the early times of persecution the office of the Mass was handed on by tradition, but, when peace came, these traditions were put together in different forms in different parts of the Church. St. Proclus tells us that, after our Lord had gone up into heaven, the apostles met together to celebrate the Holy Eucharist, and, “having found the mystic Sacrifice of our Lord’s Body a great consolation, they sang it at very great length, for this and teaching they considered preferable to anything else.” The forms of prayer which they used, he adds, were afterwards abridged; much was omitted, and it was arranged to be celebrated in a concise form.

“Of the numerous liturgies used at various times in different parts of Christendom, there are said to be three

great sources or originals, of which all the rest are substantially transcripts. Those originals are the Liturgy of St. James, that of St. Mark, and the Roman Liturgy, or St. Peter's, according to the testimony of Pope Innocent I., who died in 417. The Liturgy of St. James is followed, more or less directly, by all the Oriental liturgies, whether of the Orthodox or of the schismatical and heretical Churches; that of St. Mark by the Ethiopian; that of Rome by the Ambrosian, and the liturgies of Roman Africa."

These liturgies are different in form and language, and yet they are all the same—that is, they all express the same faith and the same idea of Sacrifice.

They contain :

1. Prayer for the dead.
2. A narrative of the institution of the Holy Eucharist, which is almost, word for word, the same in every liturgy except the Ethiopian, and yet it is not taken from any of the Scripture accounts.
3. A prayer that God will make or change the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ.
4. They declare that a mystery and sacrifice are celebrated, and they contain an actual sacrificial oblation.
5. The mixture of water with the wine is named in each, either in the prayers themselves, or in the rubrics.
6. The sign of the cross.
7. And probably, also, the invocation of saints, in terms more or less direct, forms a primitive portion of nearly all the Liturgies.

We are familiar with all these things as they appear in the Latin Mass, which we ourselves constantly hear; but it will be useful to give some passages from the Eastern liturgies, in which these same truths are expressed in very remarkable language.

In the Syriac Liturgy, after the words of institution come these words: "And may Thy Holy Spirit come down upon us and upon these gifts which be before us, and may He sanctify them, and make this bread the glorious Body of our Lord Jesus Christ, a heavenly body, a life-giving body, a precious body, for the expiation of

faults and the remission of sins, and life everlasting to those who receive it." The liturgy of the Nestorians, which is supposed to go back to a date before the time of Nestorius—A.D. 450—says: "Mother of our Lord Jesus Christ, pray for me to thine only Son, who was born of thee, that He may forgive my sins, and receive from my weak and sinful hands this Sacrifice."

The Coptic Liturgy, from the fourth century, says: "Send down upon us the grace of Thy Holy Spirit, that He may sanctify and change these gifts set before us into the body and blood of our salvation. And mayest Thou make this bread indeed Thy holy Body, O Lord our God and Saviour Jesus Christ, which is given for the remission of sins and life everlasting to those who partake of it. And again, this chalice the precious blood of Thy New Testament, O Lord our God and Saviour, which blood is given for the remission of sins and life everlasting to those who partake of it."

I will conclude with one other passage from the Ethiopian Liturgy: "Now, also, O Lord, celebrating the memory of Thy death and resurrection, we offer to Thee this bread and this chalice, giving thanks to Thee, that by them Thou hast made us worthy to stand before Thee, and to perform the priestly office unto Thee. We pray Thee, O Lord, and beseech Thee, that Thou send the Holy Spirit and power upon this bread and this chalice, and that He make them both the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, for ever and ever. Amen. . . . Hosts of angels stand before the Saviour of the world, and surround the Body and Blood of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ: let us approach before His Presence and venerate Christ with faith (*deacon*). Adore God with fear. . . . The holy, precious, living and true Body of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, which is given for remission of sins and everlasting life to those who receive it with faith. Amen. . . . This is, in real truth, the body and blood of Emmanuel. Amen. I believe, I believe, I believe, from this time forth, now and for evermore. Amen. This is the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, which He received of the Lady of us all—



the holy and pure Virgin Mary" (*Faith of Catholic*. Waterworth. Vol. II., pp. 505, 179, 188, 189, 192).

These few examples, taken at random from a great many passages, will serve to show the spirit of faith and devotion which runs through the liturgies of the Eastern Church. In all of them we have the same things put constantly before us : that the Mass is not merely a form of prayer, but that a great action is done ; that the change of Transubstantiation is accomplished, by which our Lord becomes present on the altar, and claims all our reverence and love ; and that, on the altar, He offers Himself in Sacrifice to obtain for men "the remission of sins and everlasting life."

The worship of Sacrifice belongs exclusively to God, and cannot, without idolatry, be offered to any creature. We constantly hear of Masses of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and of the saints ; and although it is quite unnecessary to say that Mass could not possibly be offered to any being but Almighty God, it may be useful to explain why these terms are used.

The Mass is, in substance, always the same ; not only is the action always the same, and the great ends for which it is offered the same, but in all the important sacrificial parts the words used are the same. Besides these great ends, however, there are certain subordinate objects and intentions which are specially alluded to in what may be called the accidental prayers of the Mass. Thus, on a feast of our Lady, besides the general ends of Sacrifice, we have in view to thank God for the graces and privileges bestowed upon His Blessed Mother, and to ask her specially to join her prayers to ours in the Sacrifice we are offering. In a Mass of thanksgiving, or a Mass for the dead, it is the same ; the general end and object of the Mass, and of all the sacrificial prayers offered, is that common to all Masses, but we have the secondary end of thanking God for favours received, or of asking mercy for our departed brethren.

The prayers at Mass are of two kinds—there is the Ordinary of the Mass, which never changes, or changes very little, and the movable prayers, which vary every

day. The movable prayers can easily be found in the Missal, but the Ordinary is contained in almost all the ordinary prayer-books, and with that you can follow the priest quite sufficiently for purposes of devotion. The movable part consists of four selections of verses taken from the Holy Scriptures: the Introit, when the priest goes up to the altar; the Gradual, between the Epistle and Gospel; the Offertory, just before the offering of the bread and wine; and the Communion, after the priest and people have received the Blessed Sacrament. 2. Three sets of formal prayers: the Collects, the Secrets, and the Post Communions; and 3. The Epistle and Gospel. These are selections from Holy Scripture, and have reference to the special object or occasion of the Mass, as well as to the ends of Sacrifice generally.

The Ordinary of the Mass is divided into two great parts—the preparation for the Sacrifice and the Sacrifice itself. The preparation consists of the prayers in which the priest prepares himself and the people for the great work he is going to do; he makes a humble confession at the foot of the altar, and asks pardon for his sins; he recites the selections of Holy Scripture and prayers appointed, and also generally the *Gloria*, and on some days the *Credo*, to praise God and make a profession of faith. The next preparation is to get ready the bread and wine for the Sacrifice, and formally offer them to God for the ends of Sacrifice to be consecrated, and become the Body and Blood of our Lord. The preparation concludes with the Secrets—that is, a set of prayers corresponding to the Collects, but which are said secretly.

The part of the Mass which contains the Sacrifice may be said to begin with the Preface, a solemn introduction to the Canon, or most sacred part of the Mass. It concludes with the *Sanctus*: the words, “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Sabaoth! Heaven and earth are full of Thy glory. Hosanna in the highest!” At these words the bell rings to remind us that the Canon, or most solemn part of the Mass, has begun.

The Canon contains the consecration and solemn offer-

ing to God of the Sacred Host in these words: "We most humbly beseech Thee, Almighty God, command these things to be carried by the hands of Thy holy angel to Thy altar on high, in the sight of Thy Divine Majesty." It also contains the prayer for the whole Church, "Communicating with, and honouring the Blessed Virgin Mary, and all the saints reigning with Christ, and also the commemoration of the living and of the dead.

The *Pater Noster* and the following prayers—the *Agnus Dei* and *Domine, non sum dignus*—are the special preparation for Communion, and the rest of the Mass is chiefly taken up with prayers of thanksgiving after Communion.

And now, to conclude this short sketch of the Ritual of the Mass, we must always remember that the great object in view is to "show forth the death of the Lord," and to participate in the merits of His gracious Sacrifice. We may hear Mass in many different ways, but our one prevailing thought should be that we are called to Mount Calvary to stand at the foot of the cross. Around that cross is gathered together, in spirit, the whole Christian Church: the blessed in heaven, who have washed their robes and made them white in the Blood of the Lamb, who praise and thank Him for their glory; the souls of the faithful, who look longingly to Him for their deliverance, and all poor sinners who have no hope of pardon or grace, except in that great Sacrifice which He offered for their redemption.

Let us take our place amongst this multitude, that, as that Holy Sacrifice is renewed upon the altar, the fruits of the Precious Blood may be poured into our souls.







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